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# “It’s Just Not That Simple:” Territory and Politics at Girdwood Park

Kyra Fallon  
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**“It’s just not that simple:”**  
**Territory and politics at Girdwood Park**



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SIT Ireland: Transformation of Social and Political Conflict  
Spring 2011  
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## **Abstract**

This report is the outcome of a month long study of space and territory in North Belfast. Data was obtained by way of qualitative methods using focused interviews and mapping, within theoretical frameworks from sociology and human geography. Segregation, space, and demographic change are explored as factors of localized territorial conflict. This theory is applied to the Crumlin Road Gaol and Girdwood Barracks regeneration project in North Belfast, where the contentious issue of housing on the site has stalled other development. The research finds that these factors do play a role in the project and also seeks to explore the Girdwood project's relationship to the current political climate in Northern Ireland, particularly the peace process. Recommendations for further research include the future of the project and other aspects including economics or the practicalities of cross-community relationships.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank several people who have been so helpful in the process and creation of this project. My advisor, Pete Shirlow, was kind enough to meet me on my first day in Belfast and gave my project some solid ground to stand on. Aeveen, for listening to me flounder around as I tried to figure out what I was interested in and for patiently helping me to focus my ideas and encourage me not to be afraid of just jumping in! My host mom Carmel, for her hospitality, delicious snacks, and steady encouragement during the entire semester. My dad, for even going so far as to get up at 5 AM in Pennsylvania to remind me that I could do it. And my fellow Stranmillis inmates, for sharing their time and energy with me and providing plenty of legitimate and fun distractions. Finally, and certainly not least, my informants and network of contacts without whom the whole project would have crashed: Jennie, Mary Ellen, Stephen, Paul, John, Manus, Joe, Danny. They were patient, hospitable, and helpful throughout my time in Belfast and I really hope this paper does justice to their thoughts and kindness.

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## **I. Introduction**

Before we even left the United States we were asked to start thinking about our study projects in the form of a research proposal on the application to study abroad. On first thinking about what I could possibly study during my time in here, I felt as though I did not have enough information or understanding to pick a topic. Using that fabulous learning tool, the internet, I read about the “peace walls” and their development over the years and was utterly fascinated. It never even crossed my mind that they would be a popular topic of study, because most of the people I talked to at home had never heard of them. When I got here and heard how much discussion the peace walls stimulate, I tried to figure out what it was that drew me to them. During our time in Northern Ireland in March, I got the chance to experience them; I was struck over and over again by the images of separation and segregation, from the peace walls in West Belfast to the River Foyle in Derry. When we returned to our classroom in Dublin I wanted determine how I could use that interest in separation to find a less researched topic than the peace walls so I could do something new. I began to conceptualize ideas about physical separation, space, community, and policy. I wondered how these ideas intertwined.

With Aeveen’s help, I developed an idea for what she termed a “portable” project; I wanted to learn about community by looking at segregated facilities such as leisure centers, but I did not have a site to study. When I got to Belfast with nothing but a few names and, I admit, a rather vague idea for a project, I was glad to have an advisor who had a much better understanding of the area. He suggested I take my interest in space and segregation and do a case study, not on two different groups, but on one contentious site. He told me about the Girdwood Park project, gave me a basic understanding of some of the issues involved, and I

knew that it had the potential to be a really interesting, and relevant, way to explore my interests.

As I started reading about the project, I began to develop a wholly new set of questions focused on the site and the project. I questioned the importance of physical barriers such as walls and spaces at interface areas. What is the role of segregation and territory in the debate over the project? How does the changing demographic relationship between the communities affect the project and its controversy? What do the communities have to lose or gain; in other words, what is at stake? How can this project serve as a valuable case study; how does it reflect the peace process and other patterns in Northern Ireland? With these thoughts, as well as more general questions about the people and the project itself, I started to dig into the government reports, books, and interviews eager to gather information.

This paper is meant to be an honest reflection on what I have learned and seen. The process of gathering my data, organizing it, and analyzing it was sometimes frustrating as I tried to fit things in ways that did not work, draw patterns that were not there, and at one point almost completely gave up my theoretical framework and started over. As I met people and they shared honestly with me about their concerns and hopes, I could not help but want to do complete justice to their words and try to present everything they shared with me as truthfully as possible. At times I felt so overwhelmed with information; there was so much to see and hear and understand. With a few more weeks of research I could have written a book about the many issues and controversies to be found on one 30-acre plot of land. But remembering the constraints, I tried to stick with my original interest and focus my thoughts and analysis toward

it. That being said, I would highly recommend reading the transcripts of my interviews; there is so much there that I could not even touch on, but my conversations with community workers provided a huge amount of depth and richness to my experience that really influenced the writing of this paper.

I hope to do justice to the words and ideas of the people I talked to and the issues at hand. At first glance some of the controversies around this project seem slight and it is easy, from an outside perspective, to wonder why something that seems so important has been put off by some of these issues. But one thing I have come to appreciate in doing this research is that my own short experience of these things does not qualify me to judge the experience of others. Even if I stayed for years in Belfast, I could never fully understand or appreciate the experiences of the people whose opinions this paper tries to present. It is easy for academics to theorize and imagine what might be important, but the realities of the situation are beyond my grasp, at least, and I hope that this paper does justice to that fact by presenting a fair summary of the things I have learned, and that my attempt at drawing a theoretical framework over them does not lessen the importance of those realities.

## **II. Methods**

When I initially imagined myself working on my project, like the happy anthropology student I am, I saw two and a half weeks of participant observation, getting to know people, building rapport, and spending time just “hanging out.” We had talked about it in class, I had done it before and enjoyed it, and that was what I hoped for in a project. However, as my interests and ideas moved more and more into the abstract, I was having a hard time pin

pointing one group that would serve as a “site” for that particular method of study. When it came time to settle on something and I realized that my interests might be better served looking at a particular space rather than a particular group, it seemed that my expectations for methodology would have to change. In order to do a case study on spatial relationships, my methodology became interview-focused and rather mobile.

#### A. Interviews

Before I left Dublin, I sent out some emails to people we had met and other SIT contacts in order to utilize the network of people I had available. I was looking initially for politicians, community workers, and members: anyone who might be able to speak to me from their own experiences. Because I had little focus at that point, the only one of those initial contacts that eventually became a part of my research was Mary Ellen Campbell, a community worker in North Belfast. The next two people I spoke to, Paul O’Neill at the Ashton Community Trust, Antrim Road, and Stephen Reid at the Vine Centre, Crumlin Road, were suggested to me by my advisor who had connections with them from previous work in North Belfast and who knew they could talk to me specifically about the question of Girdwood. I had discovered the Belfast Interface Project (BIP) during my preliminary research and I made contact with them at the suggestion of my advisor as well. Finally, after looking through pages and pages on community groups, I found the Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum (CCRF), and Manus Maguire, through a BIP publication.

I conducted a total of six interviews over the seventeen days. In general, when I looked for contacts, I wanted to meet with people who had some understanding of the area in



particular or who could speak to me about Belfast as a whole; I thought it would be important to get localized perspectives as well as broader understandings. Some of my interviewees were helpful in connecting me with other people or places of interest, which is how I ended up visiting the Department for Social Development (DSD) to get a government perspective of the project. I wanted to get a balanced view of the issues, so I tried to meet people from both Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist and Catholic/Nationalist/Republican backgrounds as well as people who might consider themselves somewhat neutral. When I left Belfast I had talked to more people from Nationalist areas; I had attempted to make contact with another community group in Lower Oldpark, the unionist community adjoining the Girdwood site, which would have helped to balance out my data, but was unable to before I left. Thus, I find that I have more information coming from the Nationalist perspective, but I have tried to balance this with other sources. I was also aware that the overwhelming majority of my interviews were conducted with middle-aged men, community leaders. I believe that this gender imbalance is simply due to the time restrictions I had in obtaining contacts; I relied on a network that branched out from my advisor. I am confident that, if I had had more time and resources, I would have found a much more varied pool of informants.

I made the decision early on not to prepare a set of questions for each interview, even though I have previously relied heavily on such an instrument. Although I did have an understanding of the issues and the project before I began interviewing, I did not want to place my own priorities onto the issues and so I came to each interview with a set of topics that I wanted to touch on, but I wanted to allow each informant to speak about what was most important. In retrospect, I certainly could have taken a little bit more control of the interviews,

but I am pleased with the results; the interviews produced a huge amount of information and, by allowing individuals to speak about what they saw as most important, I was able to compare the interviews against each other. If I were to go back and follow up with my contacts or meet with more people, I would probably come with a more focused set of questions, but what I have has provided me with much to think about and sort through. After the interviews, four of which I recorded, I transcribed the recordings or typed out a fuller set of notes in order to analyze each interview as a whole and make connections between them. The transcriptions are included in the appendix.

The most difficult part of the entire process was trying to procure interviews with people. I had never thought about it before, but when you talk about community workers in Belfast you are talking about a very busy set of people. That fact, coupled with my anxiety about reaching out to people in the fear that I would be an annoyance, made it hard for me to find people to speak with in the early days of research. However, once I did make contact, I found that people were eager to help and more than willing to give me their time and thoughts. As usual, it was the fear of meeting people more than actually meeting them that was a hindrance; when I met them, I felt comfortable talking to people and almost everyone had a really easy way of relating to me. The only other difficult part about interviewing was trying to remain objective and focus on what each person said, rather than thinking about ideas that I had already formed about what should or should not be done. I could not help but form my own opinions during my initial research on the Girdwood project, which included reading about the project itself and getting a sense of the place. I have tried as much as possible to separate them from my observations.

## B. Exploring the Space

As I was looking at a particular site during my research, I decided it would be beneficial to have an understanding and experience of it. On several occasions I explored not only the perimeter of the Girdwood site and the neighborhoods adjoining it, but at the suggestion of some of the community workers I met, I took time to explore and experience the wider community of Inner North Belfast. Some of these visits were impromptu as I never quite grasped the bus timetables and always arrived substantially early to meetings. Other visits were purposeful; I brought my camera, noted landmarks and neighborhoods, and tried to observe as much as I could the way the neighborhoods were situated, how they represented themselves, and the need that could be seen from the outside. This time proved to be invaluable not only in that I then had direct knowledge of sites that my contacts talked about, but also in having an experience of walking the streets, seeing the interface, and getting a glimpse, however small, of the communities concerned. On these visits I tried to observe objectively, but I was also actively aware of my emotions and personal experiences of these visits. As I spent more time there my perspective evolved and I became more comfortable, but each experience, I think, had its own role to play in my experience of the site.

## C. The Literature

As I started to search for a theoretical framework for my research, I found that there are several people who have literally “written the book” on segregation and space in Northern Ireland: my own advisor Pete Shirlow, and Brendan Murtagh. Their book, “Belfast: Segregation, Violence, and the City” as well as Murtagh’s “The Politics of Territory: Policy and Segregation in

Northern Ireland,” were incredibly helpful in thinking about my topic and contextualizing Girdwood into the larger world of “post-conflict” Northern Ireland. Not only were the insights from their research helpful, but they provided a lot of theory and outside information in presenting their own that would help to focus and direct my research. As it is probably evident, Dr Shirlow was incredibly helpful not only as an academic advisor during the process but also as someone who was intimately aware of the issues at hand, having studied them himself very thoroughly.

I was expecting and hoping to find related research from different areas of the world, that I could look for patterns and comparisons in that quarter. I was surprised, therefore, at the difficulty I had in finding such literature. I found a good deal of research that dealt with segregation in places like Israel/Palestine, but I had a hard time finding anything dealing with territoriality and conflict in the more local terms that I was interested in. Territoriality was analyzed by many at a state and international level, which did not provide much when I considered the scale and intimacy of the concerns at Girdwood. I did find one discussion of the conflict in the Balkans, “Population Dynamics and Susceptibility for Ethnic Conflict: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina,” which proved helpful in that it dealt with the affects of demographic change and resource competitions in ethnic conflict. It discussed relations between communities of groups in conflict and provided a lens through which I could look at competition for resources (namely, land and space). Based on the research I have done, my paper will contribute to the overall literature on Northern Ireland because it is the first to look specifically at Girdwood and how issues of segregation and territory can have a very real affect on regeneration and development. It is easy to consider how segregation might affect community

relations, but it is also important to examine cross-community issues like jobs, disadvantage, and poverty and how they are affected. Housing has been a contentious issue in Northern Ireland for a long time, and the fact that it is still contentious should be the cause of some investigation.

### **III. Analysis**

#### **A. Mapping Segregation, Space, and Demographics: Theories of Territoriality**

In highly polarized societies, it is not surprising to find that groups at odds with each other might unconsciously or purposefully become separated not only ideologically but physically, in terms of space and territory. From an outsider's perspective, the physical separation of communities as a result of conflict is confusing and disturbing. Fields such as human geography and sociology have noted possible causes and impacts of segregation. Brendan Murtagh (2002) suggests that communities in conflict can benefit from segregation in that it allows for more social cohesion, preservation of culture, and a feeling of safety from attack (34). While segregation may be beneficial in that sense for a single-identity community, it becomes complicated when that community is part of a larger whole, and particularly when it is in conflict with parts of that whole. Segregated communities have a much more heightened sense of the existence of an "out-group," with which they may have little contact, minimizing "opportunities for mutual learning and respect about the 'other's' identity" (Murtagh 2002, 36). Coupled with strengthened social cohesion, this segregation has the potential to create

multiple “communities” living within a close proximity of each other but having little or no connections other than physical distance.

Closely related issues when studying segregation and conflict include the study of “space,” and the more concrete study of demographics. Space is perhaps the physical component of segregation, the arena in which it takes place; demographics are important to consider when communities in conflict interact. In areas of conflict, space may become politicized as the physical, geographical dimension of the conflict itself (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006, 18). For communities, land use and space become vital for the expression of identity and community, thus owning, claiming, and politicizing space (Murtagh 2002, 32). In some cases this is obvious even to outsiders, but to those living in segregated, politicized communities these identities manifest themselves as a spatial awareness of where one is “in” or “out,” and therefore where it would be safe or dangerous to go. These “mental maps” of space become an important part of life (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006, 70).

Demographics have proved important in multiple conflict scenarios. In the Balkans, research has suggested that studies of community demographics in the twenty years leading up to the outbreak of war show how demographic tensions were likely a huge factor in the conflict. Larger family size in Muslim communities slowly became a threat to nearby Serb communities (Slack and Doyon 2001, 145). Demographic tensions such as these could be related to two theories: that of tipping point, of interest in this section, and resource competition, which will be discussed below. The concept of tipping point, as outlined by Murtagh (2002), suggests that there is a certain level of social interaction that ethnic groups will tolerate before one leaves and the other replaces it (35). This becomes important when

considering how space is related to community identity; when a community is “forced” to vacate its space because of the growing population of another group, it loses the means of community expression and the creation of social cohesion it had before.

Territory and territoriality come into play when considering the tensions created by these three related concepts: the social cohesion and isolation afforded by segregation, the space for community expression, and the push and pull of competing demographics. When considering the importance of land as a resource (not only for material needs of shelter, but for the above mentioned purpose of community space), and the perceived threat that it is under simply because of the existence and possible growth of the “other” group, it is easy to imagine how it becomes important to protect that resource. This need to protect one’s own territory or space could be considered a definition of territoriality (Murtagh 2002, 34-35).

The tensions that make up and lead to territoriality each play a role in the Northern Irish context and will be discussed further, but it is also interesting to note the effect that territoriality may have on communities. Disputes over territory, on one hand, often arise from the segregation of communities and lead to further segregation, in that such disputes often justify the need to avoid the “other” (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006, 3). Competition for resources, by way of the competition theory, could also play a role in the reinforcing of space and territoriality. The theory suggests that increased competition between ethnic groups for resources like housing and land encourages collective action within ethnic groups. This was suggested to have played a part in the conflict in the Balkans, where demographic changes meant that groups were competing for resources like land and power, in the form of jobs. The heightened competition enacted ethnic identities and action (Slack and Doyon 2001, 144). In a

similar way, where the resource competition takes the form of territoriality, it could be said that the threat of competition itself encourages groups to identify with their “in” group and act on its behalf.

## B. Northern Ireland and North Belfast – the context

The history of the political and social conflict in Northern Ireland is one that is not unfamiliar to most that are old enough to remember it. For the purposes of this analysis, it is important to note that the conflict in Northern Ireland, which was born out of a long standing tension between minority Catholics and the majority Protestant population, is more complex than simply a religious conflict. Since the partition of the island in 1921 into two nations, there has been a great deal of contention over the legacy of Northern Ireland due to the two prominent ethnic and historical traditions there, the Scottish/British/Protestant tradition and the Irish/Catholic. Although religion has become a defining characteristic of the two groups, the conflict itself has deep political importance. Traditionally, and as simply as possible, Protestants associate with Great Britain and encourage a connection with the United Kingdom while Catholics tend to be more supportive of a United Ireland or at least severing ties with Britain. The current constitutional status of Northern Ireland is completely dependent on the will of the majority in Northern Ireland according to the Belfast Agreement which officially ended the conflict in 1998. Politics in Northern Ireland remain tied to this constitutional issue.

To zoom in a closer to the current context of North Belfast requires an understanding of the social and political landscape in that part of the city. Some areas of the city of Belfast, and indeed of Northern Ireland, are segregated into broader areas of “green” and “orange.” West



Belfast can effectively be split into two sections separated by an interface wall: the Catholic Falls and the Protestant Shankill. (Similarly, the city of Derry/Londonderry, with the exception of one small neighborhood, is divided by the river Foyle, with Catholics making up the majority on the Cityside and Protestants on the Waterside.) In North Belfast, however, the communities are much closer together and much less obviously delineated. Enclave communities are spaced throughout, meaning that there are a multitude of interface areas within a small section of the city. Consequently, part of the way that the conflict has been mediated there by the state has involved the allocation of land and territory through segregated housing (Murtagh 2002, 2). The segregation of the communities has shown to be both a cause and consequence of the conflict between them.

Because of this reality, the concept of the “mental mapping” of territory and space has become a very real and important part of life in North Belfast. The communities live in close quarters and interface at multiple points. This has led to what Stephen Reid, a community worker at the Vine Centre in the Protestant Crumlin community, has called an “intimate geography.” In North Belfast, he explained in an interview, “you have people who are living a matter of yards apart who in most other parts of the world would be considered to live in the same area but who perceive it very differently;” they consider themselves separate. People become intimately aware of the territory that these separate groups encompass because it has an effect on where they would or would not consider going, where they feel safe (interview).

The intimate geography of North Belfast is affected by the highly emotive nature of the political identities expressed within it, as well as the unique character of North Belfast itself. It’s patchwork makeup and many interfaces has made it a site of much violence during the

Troubles; Paul O'Neill, a community worker at the Ashton Community Trust, located in New Lodge, noted that within roughly a square mile radius of his place of work, more people died than in any other region during the conflict. People were injured, forced to leave their homes, and otherwise affected by sectarian violence to an intense degree in North Belfast (interview). The violence is not over; The Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI) reports that nearly six hundred "incidents with sectarian motivation" occurred in North Belfast in 2007/2008 alone (Department for Social Development 2008, 28). Not only are many communities areas of extreme segregation, but most can also be characterized as areas of Multiple Deprivation; poverty, lack of access to education, and housing need are prevalent. Multiple Deprivation is measured in terms of health, housing, education, and employment. When measured in 2005, thirteen of the nineteen wards in North Belfast ranked in the top 20% most deprived in Northern Ireland (Department for Social Development 2008, 15). This deprivation means that North Belfast communities are highly dependent on social and affordable housing, for which there is a great need particularly in Catholic communities.

And in demographic terms there has been a big change over the past 30 years or so. North Belfast used to be a predominantly Protestant/Unionist area, but it is now almost half and half. Also what you have is a Protestant/Unionist community which is an aging population, and in decline; a lot of people have moved out of North Belfast. Conversely within the Nationalist community you have a high density population, a very young population.  
(Paul O'Neill, Interview)

This excerpt from an interview sums up what seems to be the general understanding of demographic changes in North Belfast. The demographic decline of Protestant populations and the "greening" of other areas, as it was phrased by Joe O'Donnell at BIP, are linked to other

gains that the Catholic community has made in cultural sovereignty and political power (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006, 15). If the example of Bosnia is to provide any insight, one could imagine that the larger, younger Catholic families might be perceived as a threat by Protestant communities. An author in the Economist certainly saw it this way. “Protestants,” he wrote, “are losing control, both of territory and of political institutions, and this has made them fearful and angry.” He goes on to relate these frustrations with incidents such as Holy Cross, where young girls on their way to Catholic school were mocked by Protestants lining the streets, because the quickest way to the school happened to cut through a Protestant neighborhood (The Economist, 2001). Incidents like this demonstrate the increasing territoriality that accompanies the recent demographic and political shifts in North Belfast, and add to the complex nature of building communities and even providing basic needs.

### C. Housing

“There is no doubt that the segregated nature of North Belfast gets in the way of meeting housing need and prevents the best use being made of existing housing and land... The Housing Executive cannot engineer territorial adjustments in North Belfast. In fact such a politically sensitive issue is beyond the ability of any agency to deliver.”

(North Belfast Housing Strategy, quoted in Shirlow and Murtagh 2006, 164).

As indicated by the above quote, the many complexities of the social and political climate in North Belfast make it nearly impossible for government to find a way to provide for both communities equally according to their need. This is most acute when it comes to providing social (public) housing. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) is responsible

for planning and contracting new housing sites to meet need for social and affordable housing (Danny Byrne interview). The NIHE admits that the current state of North Belfast and the demands of segregated housing have created “two separate housing markets:” lengthy waiting lists for Catholic communities and Protestant need that can largely be met through turnover in existing housing (Department for Social Development 2008, 37). Many people pointed out to me, and I noticed when I walked through the neighborhoods, that there is an excess of empty and derelict housing in Protestant neighborhoods. Manus Maguire, a community worker at the Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum, which sits on the Catholic side of the interface of Cliftonville and Lower Oldpark, noted that Catholics are much more likely to live directly adjacent to interface walls because of the great need for housing, whereas Protestants tend to have greater choice and will choose to live elsewhere than at the interface (interview). Where many middle class Protestants left North Belfast during the Troubles, leaving behind the elderly and the most in need, lack of opportunity and a desire to remain in the communities they were raised in have been largely responsible for the growth of the Catholic population and the need for housing in these neighborhoods (The Economist 2001, Paul O’Neill interview). With the land on the outskirts of Protestant communities in many cases lying vacant, Catholic community workers and politicians begin to see these areas as “natural” directions in which Catholic communities can grow (Mary Ellen Campbell interview). The case study of the regeneration plan at Girdwood Park, discussed below, brings together these issues of segregation, territory, demographic shifts, and housing in one large debate.

#### D. Girdwood Park– a case study in regeneration and territory



##### **The Site**

The Girdwood Park site consists of a decommissioned army barracks and the old Crumlin Road Gaol. The Gaol, which is most commonly known today as a place where republican prisoners were held

and tortured during internment, was in use until 1996. It was designed by Charles Lanyon, who also designed several other buildings in Belfast including some at Queen's University, and based on the "radial cellular" model of Pentonville Prison in London that was state-of-the-art in its time. It is currently a Grade A listed building, meaning that the government has the responsibility to preserve it (Masterplan, 12). The Gaol was noted as a possible site for economic and physical regeneration in 2003 when it was acquired by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). In September 2004 it was announced that the Crumlin Road Gaol and the Girdwood Barracks would be united as a regeneration project under one master plan (Danny Byrne interview). In 2005 the barracks were decommissioned as part of the demilitarization of Northern Ireland and in 2006 the site was purchased by the DSD (BDP 12, Danny Byrne). From there it was under that department's control to prepare a plan of regeneration for both sites, discussed below.

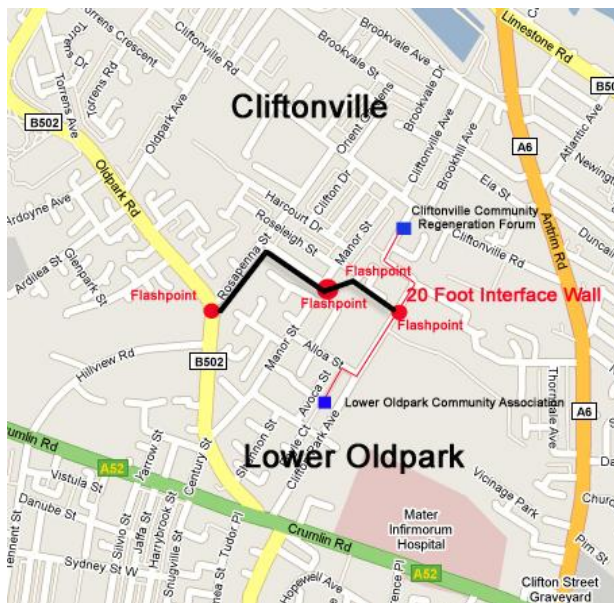
## The Communities

The Girdwood Park site is geographically as well as historically significant. It sits at the intersection of five electoral wards: Catholic Ardoyne, New Lodge, and Waterworks, and Protestant Crumlin and Shankill (BDP 18). These, according to information from 2005, are some of the most deprived wards in the country. Shankill rated number one on the scale of Multiple



Deprivation, Crumlin fourth, New Lodge fifth, Ardoyne seventh, and Waterworks sixteenth (Department for Social Development 2008, 15). Because of the way the wards are situated, the “spatial grouping of Girdwood barracks and the gaol creates a large physical divide within the area inhibiting the building of relationships between different sides of the community” (BDP 15). The role that this site might currently play as an interface barrier or buffer zone was not directly acknowledged by the people I spoke with, but it seems to certainly affect the way that people view the site.

Another consideration is the physical presence of an interface wall that separates the Catholic Cliftonville neighborhood from the Protestant Lower Oldpark. These neighborhoods directly adjoin the site, and the interface, the “yellow wall,” sits toward the top of the Girdwood site on Cliftonpark Avenue. Manus Maguire, who works building good relations across the interface and works in a building almost along the wall, spoke to me about his own



experiences of the interface.

Then after 1998 this place went nuts... there was people shot here, houses attacked. There would've been a huge number of pipe bombs thrown from the UDA. And along the front of Cliftonpark Avenue at night was like a scene out of *Mad Max*; it was just nuts. So there was high level of interface conflict (interview). (Image courtesy of Manus Maguire)

Today, he says, things have “relatively” calmed down, but there are still important flashpoints

for violence along the interface. From his own neighborhood on the Cliftonville side, he often deals with negotiations about Orange Parades coming through the area. He explained that this year things have been “quiet” so far, but the main flashpoints for violence “can go off at any time” (interview). I often talked with people in Belfast about the presence of the walls there, and about the possibility that walls reinforce fears about what is on the other side and actually become places where violence is targeted. In my own experience of walking the neighborhoods and seeing the area around the interface, although there were other anxieties involved, I could not help but notice the feeling of being under siege, feeling that, because the wall is there,

there must be a necessity for it. In any case, the interface there remains an important point of contention in the eyes of the people living around it.

### **The Project**

From the time the Girdwood project was conceived in 2004, it was viewed by many as an opportunity to create a “symbol of hope and economic regeneration” in a place where it was much needed (BDP 15). The site was acknowledged as being previously “synonymous with conflict” and its redevelopment could mean not only economic but social and symbolic benefits for North Belfast (Department for Social Development, OFMDFM 2006, 2). A Girdwood Advisory Panel was formed, consisting of civil servants, politicians, and community members in hopes that the process would be inclusive. The professed goal of the Advisory Panel was to create a project of “international significance,” that would bring benefits to North and wider Belfast and “in doing so create a vibrant, inclusive, and diverse environment,” that would attract people from within and without Belfast. Guidelines for this endeavor included sustainable development, a focus on mixed-use facilities, shared space, climate for investment, historical heritage, and “sense of place” (Department for Social Development, OFMDFM 2006, 6-9). The generation of employment was acknowledged as a vital part of the economic regeneration of the area as well (BDP 5).

Manus Maguire, a community worker in Cliftonville who sat on the Advisory Panel for that neighborhood, acknowledged that the Panel members were initially very hopeful that the project would bring great benefit to their communities. As time went on they felt less and less that their input was getting a fair voice during the process, but the Masterplan was published



nonetheless in 2007 (interview). It proposed an “arc road” from Crumlin to Antrim road to provide better access, a leisure centre, playing space, social housing, retail mixed units, and a tourist center in the gaol, as well as took into consideration plans for the extension of the adjoining Mater hospital and St Malachy’s college. The Masterplan went out for consultations in the local community, and went through an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA), which Danny Byrne at the DSD described as a “legal tool” devised to determine whether the plans would negatively affect any of a number of specific groups who might be at a disadvantage, such as groups of different religious background, the disabled, or different gender groups (interview). The final results of the EQIA, as well as the current state of the plan for the Girdwood site, were published in March 2010. Although much of the site is contentious and many different parties are concerned about different parts of the plan, none of the publications fail to mention that from the very beginning, even the Advisory Panel could not agree about the planned provision of housing on the site (BDP 6).

### **The Housing Debate**

Given the larger context of North Belfast, it is not surprising that housing should be a contentious issue on a site like Girdwood. From the very beginning it was acknowledged that, while both communities saw the need for regeneration, they had very different views about housing. The original draft Masterplan states that Nationalists pointed to a massive housing need as the reason for housing to go on the site, while Unionists feared that placing housing on the site would make it nearly impossible for the site to be neutral (BDP 6). As mentioned above, the Masterplan was published without the Advisory Panel coming to an agreement about the

provision of housing, although it suggested “mixed-use” social and affordable housing on the site.

The political complexities and social context of North Belfast make it difficult to outline the concerns that surround the housing issue at Girdwood. Paul O’Neill at the Ashton Community Trust summed up the concerns of the Catholic community in that they are an growing community with no where to expand to. “People want to stay close to their roots, where their families are, where they were brought up. But there isn’t much land to develop housing, and the land that is available is in the areas that are designated as Protestant/Loyalist/Unionist areas.” He acknowledged that trying to address Catholic housing need on Protestant land would cause a good deal of division, which makes the Girdwood site a more logical place to build housing because of its neutrality (interview). Manus Maguire pointed out that Catholics are living directly against interface walls, whereas Protestants, who make up twenty percent of housing waiting lists and could “walk in a get a new house tomorrow in Lower Oldpark,” choose not to because there are more desirable places to live that are available (interview). Manus, Paul, and Mary Ellen, community workers who clearly take a great interest in their communities, understand the concerns of the Unionist community but see a site like Girdwood as an important opportunity to meet the needs of their community.

Stephen Reid at the Vine Centre acknowledged that the Protestant position on this issue might seem difficult to understand from an outsider’s perspective.

But I suppose it sounds then very negative [to oppose housing] because there is an assumption then that if you’re saying you don’t want housing on the site that you are against meeting their need. There’s clear evidence of housing need and the vast

majority of that comes from people in the Nationalist community. The question is whether or not the Girdwood site is the best vehicle for partly meeting that need (interview).

I have come across two main concerns arise from the discussion of housing on the Girdwood site. The first is the question of the interface; not only is the current interface delicate, but bringing housing onto the site would create another interface and bring the communities closer together physically. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) voiced its concern that adding housing onto the Girdwood site would bring the interface “onto the doorsteps” of people living on Cliftonpark Avenue (DUP 2010). Stephen Reid echoed that concern, noting that people are in general wary of that interface area, and changing it, moving it, is a concern to people living there (interview). The second concern is that bringing housing onto the site would politicize it and damage the potential for it to be a shared space. The DUP certainly feels that way, saying that the call to put housing on the site abandons the principle of shared space and can potentially damage relations between the two communities (DUP 2011). Again Stephen Reid explains: “they talked about having a site which was going to be accessible to both communities; the word they used was porous. That’s not people’s experience of what happens when you put houses somewhere” (interview). Based on this information, the general concerns about housing on the Protestant side could be summarized as the creation of a new interface and the way that space is politicized when housing is introduced.

At one point the logistical question about housing on the site was manifest in terms of when it should be built, if it was to be built at all. In the EQIA report, published in March 2010, there is a good deal of discussion of housing and not much agreement about it, but two entries that stick out deal with the priority that housing is to be given in the phased process of building

on the site. The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), a party with mostly Catholic/Nationalist support, expressed its feeling that leaving housing until a later phase of the project would not prioritize the need for housing in the area. Meanwhile, the Immanuel Presbyterian Church on Agnes Street in the Shankill wrote that, expecting housing to be Catholic, building it in the first phase would discourage integration on the site and “less controversial” issues should form the early phases of the project, in order to nurture “cross community confidence and good relations” before housing is built (Department for Social Development 2010, 11).

At the moment the housing question has taken a political turn because of two announcements made by former SDLP Ministers for Social Development, Margaret Ritchie in 2010 and Alex Attwood this past March, which affirmed the Department’s intention of building housing on the site. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) “slammed” the SDLP ministers for these announcements and each time assured its constituents that nothing would be built there without the approval of the First Minister of the executive (DUP 2010, 2011). Paul O’Neill described the move by Minister Attwood as “cynical,” in that there is an election approaching and the SDLP is in constant competition with Sinn Féin for North Belfast votes. He mentioned his frustration about the “political opportunism” that damages cross-community relationships, which he believes are being built from the ground up in North Belfast (interview). Stephen Reid expressed his concern that election time is not the best time to be making moves which are so contentious along sectarian lines, echoing Paul’s concern that it is damaging to relationships and the entire process of cooperation on this project (interview).

## **The Proposed Solution**

The recommendation of the Masterplan is, in accordance with the aspiration for “Shared Space,” to build mixed-use housing on the site, or housing meant for a mixed community of Catholics and Protestants. Housing was identified by a consultation on the “Shared Future” policy, along with education and security, as a major priority for encouraging “sharing over separation” and creating a shared society (Goldie and Ruddy 2010, 17). By addressing this, the authors of the Masterplan expressed a hope to see a “living, vibrant” community on the Girdwood site and make it more inclusive (Masterplan, 6). Although this concept seems to be in keeping with government policies for inclusion, mixed housing is meaningless unless people from both communities were willing to live there. Stephen Reid said this: “The plans look great on paper, but the reality is that nothing ever turns out quite as well as it’s planned. Would it be nice if there was a mixed housing development on the site? Yes. Is it realistic? Currently, no” (interview). Manus Maguire has found that people in Cliftonville are ready and willing to cooperate, to work together, and to begin to share space, but he did not say anything about housing accommodations (interview). Even Paul O’Neill, who was incredibly encouraged by the steps he’s seen in his own community’s relationships with neighboring Protestant communities, does not see mixed housing as a viable option. “We’re not in a situation yet where people feel comfortable with living in mixed neighborhoods.” His reasoning was that people still think in terms of “what we have we hold;” in other words, they are concerned about maintaining their own communities (interview).

The prospects for mixed housing do seem dim. Not only are community members less than confident about its success, but politicians in the DUP do not even believe that it was the

government's intention to create mixed housing. Their response to the original findings of the EQIA found that the DSD had ignored housing need in the Shankill to focus on Catholic need, basically saying, "no one from this Protestant community need apply." They had little confidence that housing would ever be shared on the site (Department for Social Development/DUP, 2010). Danny Byrne, a member of the DSD Girdwood team who spoke with me about the project, was a little ambiguous about the way housing would play out on the site. He did put a qualifier our discussion by saying that his department was not in charge of regulating housing, but when we talked about it further he said that, in his view, at this point it would be impossible to say who would live there because social housing is allotted by need (interview).

### **Girdwood as Territory, Territory as Community**

The three concepts that I explored in my literature research were segregation, space, and demography, which together served to enact territoriality. Although people did not talk about their experiences in exactly those terms, I began to see that there was a lot in common about the way people approached the issue and what they saw as important to their communities. Girdwood, its location, and the issues that have risen throughout the planning process, have proven a good example of the way that these concepts interact.

Because they are so closely intertwined in concept, segregation and space are important to consider together. The most obvious effect that segregation has had on this project is to convince people that, if housing were to exist on the site, it would naturally be the space for one community or the other. Even though it is explicitly stated in the plans that the housing

would be ideally suited for mixed use, no one I spoke to really thought that this was a viable option. The assumption is made that, where housing exists in North Belfast, it will be either Catholic or Protestant. Because of this segregation, the physical space itself is given importance. Space, as a physical representation of the community and its identity, is automatically politicized when one group calls it home. Thus the fear on the Unionist side that housing anywhere on the Girdwood site would make it inaccessible to Protestants. This fear makes two assumptions, which, based on the theory are not entirely unfounded: the housing on the site will be exclusively for Catholics because of need and the unrealistic notion of mixed housing, and that Catholic housing would make the site a Catholic community, part of their identity, and therefore inaccessible to an “out” group.

The very idea of space as an expression of identity and group cohesion is evident in this debate. Part of the problem with housing is that people in Catholic neighborhoods do not want to leave the place where they are raised; locality and community are important to the cohesion of the local identity (Paul O’Neill interview). It is this sense of place and attachment that I noticed throughout my travels in Ireland, but in North Belfast it takes an extremely local turn. “New Lodge” or “Cliftonville” seem to be stronger identities, because they are tied to an intimate space, than “North Belfast” or even “Catholic/Nationalist/Republican.” On the other side of the wall, those important local identities are being eroded in Protestant communities by the decline in population and the perceived loss of space. The local communities are feeling destabilized by the losses they have sustained; they are declining in population and already choosing to live away from the interface. If the interface were to move forward, if the Catholic communities come closer and encroach on the space of their communities, this poses a threat

to the very identity of “Lower Oldpark” and could be “destabilizing” to that community (Stephen Reid interview). The fear seems to be that the continued loss of space could mean a further loss of social cohesion and identity.

The fear of bringing the interface closer could also be connected to the tensions associated with demographic shifts in the area. The idea of a “tipping point” becomes important here. As mentioned above, the theory of tipping point suggests ethnic groups will tolerate interaction with the “other” only up to a certain point before one leaves and the other replaces it (Murtagh 2002, 35). Under this framework, the growth of Catholic neighborhoods becomes more of a threat to the declining Protestant neighborhoods. As the term “greening” might suggest, the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland has been slowly eroded over the past thirty years (Paul O’Neill interview, Joe O’Donnell interview). Catholics seem to be replacing Protestants in government, in public spaces like jobs, and now in territory as well. If Catholic neighborhoods continue to expand in the direction of Protestant neighborhoods, bringing the interfaces closer, contact with the “other” is bound to increase. The unwritten rules of segregation and space suggest that living together is untenable, and so when the Catholic communities expand into Protestant or neutral “territory” the response may be to retreat in order to reduce contact. The retreat means loss of community space, which means loss of identity and social cohesion, which could mean further encroachment by the “other.” This threat to a resource as important as space, which has ties to land, identity, and social cohesion, may have enacted a strengthening of identity in the “in” group and motivated the group to act together to protect its territory. As religious identity in Northern Ireland is tied to broader political concerns and allegiances, namely the future of their state, the perceived



replacement of Protestant neighborhoods with Catholic ones would indeed be alarming. Thus, it becomes an issue of importance to protect the neutrality of the Girdwood site by keeping Catholic space at a distance, and the planned regeneration of an empty site becomes a “territorial dispute.”

### **Connecting the dots**

The journey of theorizing the findings of my research was long and somewhat frustrating at times. Because I was interested in space and community, I initially went into the research looking specifically for data that might tie into those interests. I wanted to talk about space and symbolism, but the people I talked to did not see those as the most important issues. At one point I lost all sense of theoretical framework as I looked back through the data I had gathered and tried to make sense of it. I had a sense of the issue of space through my background research and things I gleaned from my interviews, but I could not tie it into the larger environment of “post-conflict” Belfast. However, things started to make sense one night at what seemed like an unlikely place: a political debate. During my interview with Stephen Reid that afternoon he had mentioned how housing on the Girdwood site had become a distraction from the real issues at stake in the regeneration project like jobs and economic growth (interview). At the debate, I got a real sense of how divisive issues, for one reason or another, start to become dominant over issues that could have wider impact. The politicians were either talking about trying to make Northern Ireland work on a logistic level while ignoring the deep divisions between them, or focusing on the politics of those divisions and forgetting that they were responsible to people to try to make their lives better on a day today basis. I left the debate with two possible understandings of the Girdwood debate. The first is that people

need houses, jobs, but sectarianism in the form of territoriality and resource competition has gotten in the way. The other is that Northern Ireland is still a nation of deep, divisive conflict (I do not buy into the “post-conflict” label) and that, for the sake of day-to-day needs like jobs and housing, the conflict is simply being managed by segregation and separation, rather than addressed and worked through. In either case, the Girdwood issue illustrates the tension between these two very well. The basic need that is present is the need for housing, jobs, and general economic growth, and the conflict manifests itself as territoriality.

Pail O'Neill said something in his interview that stayed with me throughout the process. He was a really helpful informant who obviously cares about his community, although he admitted to there being many difficulties in building cross-community relationships. Toward the end of our interview he said offhandedly, “we have more problems in common than we know” (interview). He was referring to the economic problems and general disadvantage that most of North Belfast suffers from. In fact, all of the community workers that I talked to spoke about the great deprivation that exists in their communities. Four out of the five electoral wards identified by the Masterplan as communities adjacent to the site are in the highest ten ranked wards for Multiple Deprivation in the country; all five are in the top twenty (Department for Social Development 2008, 15). As I walked along the streets and saw empty and derelict homes, shops closing and a general lack of investment along the main Antrim and Crumlin roads, the deprivation was incredibly evident. This fact could be perhaps the biggest frustration for someone who watches the progress of the Girdwood site from a distance and wants it to succeed.

Belfast has been identified as a “two-speed city.” The city centre, having seen major improvement since the end of the conflict, is generally clean, welcoming, and thriving. The areas on the periphery, the places most troubled by the conflict, however, have experienced little of this revival. There has been no “peace dividend” in North Belfast, and many believed that the redevelopment of Girdwood could be a huge opportunity for growth there (Maguire 2007). Manus Maguire recalls how optimistic the Advisory Panel was in the beginning of the process about bringing opportunities to their communities (interview). However, after years of debate and stalling, most of the people I talked to are left with little hope about the project. In the beginning, people expected jobs, growth, and historical relevance as well as a connection to the city centre. Now they would be happy to see a shopping mall on the site, just to see jobs and money coming into the area (Paul O’Neill, Stephen Reid interviews).

Another professed goal of the project was the possible decrease of interface tensions and the creation of a shared, vibrant space (BDP 19). Although the housing question has made that aspiration controversial, the fact remains that many believe North Belfast would do much better without the interfaces.

In North Belfast we have about 40 interfaces. You’re not going to get a business person to invest in what is, for the want of a better term, a warzone. At certain times of year it *can be* a warzone. We’ve sort of argued that what we’ve got to do is get rid of these interfaces; there’s an economic driver in relation to addressing the good relations issue. In 20 years time if we’ve still got all these interfaces North Belfast will be a much worse place than what it is today (Manus Maguire, interview).

Not only does it seem that the creation of a shared space could have social and political benefits for North Belfast, it is entirely likely that people from the outside, including investors,

consumers, employers, and tourists, would be more likely to venture into North Belfast if it were not a place of such contention. There certainly is a sense that the economic regeneration of North Belfast is tied in to its progression away from divisive politics and segregation.

In that sense, sectarianism and territoriality have played a major role in the debate at Girdwood. The long-standing segregation and emphasis on local identity seem to have created two groups of people who, despite their close physical proximity, view themselves as totally separate communities and do not see their own welfare as being linked. There is competition for resources between groups rather than a sense of gaining for the whole area. If one group receives, the other group perceives it as a loss to its own. In the provision of services and meeting of needs, I cannot say whether it is the sectarian division that is the distraction from the “real” need or vice versa, but I do think that the two problems, the conflict and the deprivation, have closer links than most realize.

### **The Future**

When the controversy about the Girdwood site began in 2007, it was just as uncertain what would become of the project as it is today. At that time, Manus Maguire wrote an article for the Belfast Interface Project in which he outlined what he believed were the four options open to the community in terms of handling the Girdwood site. The first option was some sort of deal designed to split the site between the communities, which he felt would not offer long term benefits to anyone. The second option was to encourage private sector investment on the site, the third to cooperate across the interface to create a shared space. The fourth, and least glamorous, was to leave the site empty. He expressed a desire to see the third option

implemented, saying that the project was an ideal way to test the “shared future” aspirations of the peace process and build it from the ground up (Maguire 2007). At this point, it is difficult to be sure which of these paths the project has taken. The site certainly has sat empty for the past six years, but work has begun on the gaol to restore the main parts of the building with plans to reopen for tours in 2012. There is a vague hum about housing, but the economy has made it unlikely for the time being that major investments will come into the site.

The most promising development, according to the people I spoke with, is the proposal by the Belfast City Council to the Special European Union Programs Body (SEUPB) for funds to build a “community hub” on the site. Danny Byrne, a member of the Girdwood team at the DSD, told me about the plans for the hub. Their goal is that the hub would act as a leisure centre with other facilities like a library, training centre, or other community facilities. The SEUPB has currently deferred a decision on the funding while Belfast City Council procures proof that the communities will be involved in the planning and creation of the hub (interview). Most of the people I spoke to are optimistic about the community hub, saying that, if successful, it could bring real benefits to the community (Manus Maguire, Stephen Reid interview). Paul O’Neill believes that, if the communities are genuinely involved in the project, it could be the “kick-start” needed to get a real shared space on the Girdwood site. If people from both communities could see that a shared facility would benefit them and that developing the site is not detrimental to their communities, more developments would be likely to follow (interview). This was the only real hope expressed to me about the future of the site, however. Stephen Reid said that people would be happy even with a shopping centre but that he cannot see that happening in the near future, and Manus Maguire expressed real disappointment in

the way things have turned out and the failure to seize a valuable opportunity to revive the communities (interviews). For myself, I have to agree that as long the communities are excluded from the process, the politicians are using the controversy to their own advantage, and nothing is being done for the communities, no one is winning and a real opportunity is being squandered.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The process of doing this research has really been a long and somewhat anxious one, starting even before I got to Ireland with our original application to SIT. I labored over that research proposal for a long time, not sure how important it was and not having much background knowledge to go off of. You can imagine my relief (but also confusion and a little bit of frustration) when I found out that people rarely study what they initially proposed. I knew even then though that I wanted to do my research in Belfast, as this city was part of what had drawn me to Ireland in the first place. As I worked through different interests to find what would be best to study, what struck me most was the total fascination I had with the place and the people there. I am so grateful to have met so many helpful, kind, and inspiring people who work every day for the benefit of their communities even in the aftermath of so much unrest.

One of the most impactful things I have learned in working on this project is that it is so easy to judge, condemn, and scoff at something like this from the outside, but there is much more to it. I think I have always known this, but experiencing it firsthand was really meaningful. At first glance, it seems like building some houses and shops on a vacant lot should be an easy

job. It is easy to condemn people on one side of the wall for not allowing the needs of their neighbors to be met, and gratifying to scoff at the government for not being able to “figure it out.” However, with every person I met the situation got more and more complex and the emotions and fears of the people involved more real. We have talked so much about truth and perspective during our studies of Northern Ireland; a person’s experience of something is more impactful on their actions than the objective facts. I am constantly looking for facts and figures that can be placed in a book and easily understood. However, as Stephen Reid said, I will never understand what it is like to live the lives these people live. There’s no way I could ever codify it, quantify it, or theorize it, even though this paper is a feeble attempt at the last. What remains the most important are the realities of living on an interface, coping with the past, and building relations. Without an understanding and a value of those things, a project like Girdwood is, I think, doomed to fail.

The lesson about perspective, while coming from a very specific experience in a very specific place, is really something that goes beyond culture and even beyond the study of peace and conflict. In the states I think we have an idea of it insofar as it concerns understanding our own perspectives, and in anthropology we are encouraged to consider the viewpoint of “others,” but I think it is something that humanity in general could benefit from making regular practice. In North Belfast I felt that I encountered two groups of people who acknowledged the possible existence of viewpoints other than their own, and even went so far as to say they were valid, but did not get the sense that the existence of these other viewpoints impacted their own perspective or ideas. I have long been of the opinion that anthropology is of no use unless it

helps the wider public to see and acknowledge other perspectives, other ways of thinking and living, and this experience really furthered that belief.

I really value the time I spent working on this project, even if only for the perspective it helped me to gain on this facet of peace and conflict studies. The process itself was a high quality learning experience, as well as the time I have spent reflecting, analyzing, and writing this paper. My biggest critique of the process, and the paper itself, would just be the lack of diversity in my sources. I can blame this on a lot of factors, including the restraints of time and resources as well as my own timidity and reluctance to step outside my comfort zone. The struggle that I had finding contacts and valuable written sources was not for want of trying, but of course I could always have tried harder, looked longer, and been more persistent. I feel fairly confident that I have presented what data I was able to collect well and that I allowed for the gaps in my research, but I cannot help but wish I had had more time and more nerve.

Considering where I started, though, I think I have met my aims pretty well. It was not at all what I had in mind as far as methodology and experience, but what I was able to do was interesting, challenging, and enriching. As my dad said, this was definitely a “trial by fire,” in that my only option was just to do what needed to be done, even if it made me uncomfortable or nervous. My goal was to meet people, have an enriching experience, and come out with some personal as well as academic learning and I can confidently say that I have done that.

I hope to have done some justice to the topic, although the issues are so controversial and the perspectives so varied that I cannot imagine I have even come close to representing the spectrum. What I wanted most to represent was the complicated nature of the issues and the understandable nature of the fears and concerns that people have there. I am unable to tell



whether I have successfully done this because of the strength of my own opinions and experiences, but I have done my best to present everything in a way that will allow readers to understand what I have seen and learned and make their own judgments. If readers come away from my paper with at least an appreciation for the perspectives of the people I spoke to and the communities they represent, I should feel I have done the topic some justice.

My own academic knowledge of the subject has increased dramatically. I have learned about North Belfast and its history, the peace process, the government, the people, community work in Belfast, the communities surrounding the site, and, of course, a great deal about the Girdwood project. I feel as though my head is swimming with plans and maps and statistics. Practically, I have learned about the demands of field research, the anxieties of working “off the cuff,” and the benefits of planning and steady work.

To the person interested in continuing the study of space, segregation, or the peace process in Northern Ireland, I would recommend considering further study of Girdwood Park. Because it is a work in progress, there is so much still to be learned from the process of planning, negotiating, and building relations between communities. It was a highly complex and engaging case study, and should continue to be so for quite some time. As plans begin to come together there will be more to learn and explore, including how the housing site evolves, how the community hub works as a shared space, and how the site impacts the people living along the interface. Not only will there be more to study about the territory and space in the future, but there are many different perspectives to pursue, including but not limited to the economic impact of Girdwood, the practical questions of cross-community relationships, and the historical symbolism and significance of the gaol and barracks. It should continue to be an

interesting and important piece of study, and data collected there could be valuable in understanding future regeneration projects and creating more sustainable plans for that site.

I am exceptionally pleased to have worked on this project. From here, the paper might become a capstone project for my Peace and Justice Studies minor, as well as an influence for my capstone work for my anthropology major. It has been a valuable academic experience as well as a personal one, and through it I have fallen more in love with my studies and with Ireland. I hope to come back some day and to see the Girdwood site developed in some way that brings benefit to the communities. Although I cannot say exactly what I think that should be, after meeting such helpful and kind people I can only wish them the best.

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## Interviews

Mary Ellen Campbell. Community work in Belfast. Tuesday April 5, 2011. 1:00PM. Belfast City Hall.

Paul O'Neill. Girdwood Park. Tuesday April 12, 2011. 10:00 AM. The Ashton Centre, 5 Churchill Road, Belfast

Stephen Reid. Girdwood Park. Wednesday April 13, 2011. 2:30 PM. The Vine Centre, 193 Crumlin Road, Belfast

Joe O'Donnell. Regeneration projects and Girdwood Park. Thursday April 14, 2011. 2:30 PM. Belfast Interface Project, Cathedral Quarter Managed Workspace, Belfast

Manus Maguire. Girdwood Park. Friday April 15, 2011. 9:30 AM. Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum, 185 Cliftonpark Avenue, Belfast

Danny Byrne. Girdwood Park timeline. Monday April 18, 2011. 2:30 PM. Department for Social Development, Girdwood Office, 25 Wellington Place, Belfast

## Images

Cover Image by author

Overhead image (page 19) courtesy of [www.mygrouponi.com](http://www.mygrouponi.com). Accessed 28 April 2011.

Other images courtesy of Google Maps, edited by author, unless otherwise noted.

## VI. Appendices

### A. Interview Transcriptions

Interview with Paul O'Neill  
Tuesday 12 April, 10AM  
Ashton Centre  
5 Churchill Road, Belfast  
Transcribed

I suppose, before you start, you need to know or understand the historical context of North Belfast, where we are. Within a square mile radius of where we're sitting more people died in this particular area than in any other part of the region during the 30 years of conflict. I think it was something like 640 people or so died within a square mile radius. Thousands of people were injured. Thousands of people were imprisoned. Thousands of people were displaced from their homes. The general infrastructure was severely damaged, depleted. There was disinvestment in economic terms and the legacy of all of that still runs right through to the current day. The areas that were worst affected by the conflict are still the same areas which are, in terms of economic growth and economic regeneration, the areas that have benefitted the least from that. So you've got a lot of social disaffection, dislocation from the mainstream, and the whole legacy of the conflict: segregated communities, peace walls, divided lines, segregated living, and huge levels of tension.

And in demographic terms there has been a big change over the past 30 years or so. North Belfast used to be a predominantly Protestant/Unionist area, it is now almost half and half, a fifty-fifty split. And what you have is a Protestant/Unionist community which is an aging population and it's also in decline; a lot of people have moved out of North Belfast. Conversely within the Nationalist community what you have is a high density population, a very young population. The New lodge area has about 6000 or so people, and about a third of those people would be under the age of 23. Which gives you an idea; it's very young. And the difficulties that go with that in terms of housing need- there's a massive housing need within the Catholic/Nationalist population. People want to stay close to their roots, where their families are, where they were brought up. But there isn't much land to develop housing, and the land that is available is in the areas that are designated as Protestant/Loyalist/Unionist areas, and some of those areas no one is living in anymore. But if Catholics were to be housed there that would in itself create a massive problem and would lead to sectarian division and strife over that, because it's territorial. We're not in a situation yet where people feel comfortable with living in mixed neighborhoods. There is still that sense of "what we have we hold," type of attitude. So, all of that is playing into the current situation.

Having said all of that, the community sector in North Belfast has made great strides forward. There's a hell of a lot more cooperation. People are more trusting of each other; working

relationships, even friendships, have developed through cross community engagement, all of which wouldn't have been possible without the peace process and the political process that has come with that.

So we're in a better situation, a better place. People are far more prepared to engage, and to compromise. But there are a lot of issues still which are very very contentious and sensitive and we haven't go to the point where the issue of territory can be resolved in a more rational way. It's very emotive stuff. And that would go with the Girdwood that you mentioned earlier. Girdwood was a former army base and has massive symbolic significance because it was a massive military base in North Belfast. When that closed, people in the Nationalist community were really glad to see it go because it was a symbol of oppression basically. The Unionist community had a different view on it. They saw this as the British withdrawal in military terms from North Belfast. And the land that's been left, because it actually borders on Protestant/Unionist and Catholic/Nationalist areas, has become another area of contention in terms of what should be done with it. There's a massive housing need in Nationalist North Belfast and people within Nationalist North Belfast see that as a natural place to put housing. Having said that, people realize it cannot be a housing estate. People want it to be more of a development estate that will bring jobs and other sort of investments, leisure facilities, and so on and so forth. But also, it's an opportunity to at least take some of the pressure off the housing waiting list. So if it's done sensitively, if it's done in discussion with others then people in the Nationalist community feel that there's a very very reasonable and rational case to be made for some housing to go in there. But that is still creating difficulties.

*So I was looking at some news articles from late last year and early this year and I was reading that the government has decided to put housing there, sort of, they've said they would...*

They haven't provided people with the actual details like where the money's coming from, or anything like that. There's also a sense that because the DSD (department of social development) is a ministry which is held by the SDLP, who are competing for votes with Sinn Fein in N Belfast, that this was a wee bit cynical because of the timing with the election. And basically they reiterated what was already known. The minister, when it was Margaret Ritchie, had already stated that there would be housing there, so people were getting used to the idea of that. And it actually happened at a time when we were in discussion with (when I say we, I mean community groups) are in discussion around a possibility of an investment by Belfast city council into Girdwood. A potential leisure hub, which in itself is gonna be problematic. There are a lot of things to be discussed, there's lot of things to be worked out about what that would actually look like, what would be there, how people would avail of it, what type of community benefits would flow from all of those things. So, all of those things are difficult in their own right. And also, in terms of the development, we want to make sure, because this is an area of high deprivation, that unlike previous regeneration cites in Belfast, that it hasn't just been a case of the private sector moving in and making a lot of money out of it and local people don't benefit. We want to ensure that this site brings maximum community benefits to local people- whether that's in terms of jobs, facilities that are relevant to them, social labor and stuff like that. Possibly, hopefully, something like a community development trust being installed that could manage and oversee that process and ensure that the community does benefit from it.

And having said all of that we recognize that this would be of city-wide significance so we just can't have it exactly all our own way. We understand that it would be a major development not only for North Belfast and for deprived areas in North Belfast but for Belfast as a whole. I mean, we are approaching that in a very, I think, rational, objective way, and trying to find out what the best solutions are to that. So, the statement and the timing of the statement- most people are very disappointed by it to say the least. People from within the Unionist community have said to us that they were very angry about it because it was difficult enough for them to persuade people within their communities that Girdwood was worth developing along a cross community basis without that type of political opportunism. It makes things more difficult.

*How do you- I've read a lot about how it's been a process that's brought the community into the planning – how does that happen?*

What they originally did was set up to do a master plan; they put in place representatives from statutory agencies, government departments, political representatives, and local community representatives and they sat on a panel and hammered out a general idea of what it should look like. This then went for consultation to local people. Then they went away and basically ignored the consultation and have come back now with this "Hub" idea, which will be subjected to consultation as well.

Having said that, when all of those discussions were taking place, it was during the economic growth, and the bubble hadn't burst. And so I believe that after they would've done all of their consultation, and this is my skeptical view of it, they would've made sure that it was a private sector-led thing anyway, and that benefits to the community would've been incidental; they wouldn't have been high priority. The economic bubble has well and truly burst, so it's going to be very difficult to get private investors in there now. So, the council is now trying to take a lead on it, which I welcome. I think it's potentially good. There's a potential for a ten million pound investment there. It may not come to anything but there's potential there. And I think it actually brings it back to basics again in terms of, community engagement and involvement and what this site should look like rather than it just being an opportunity for the private sector to make more money. Because in the general context, if you look at some of the regeneration sites that have happened in Belfast there have been little or no benefits to people. The biggest, most infamous example of that would be the gasworks, which produced 4.5 thousand jobs, which in itself was a good development- don't get me wrong; I'm not trying to be nihilistic about all of this. It was a good development for Belfast; it was good development for that geographical location. But in the areas beside that, like the Market, Sandy Row, places like that, Donegall Pass, people from those areas didn't get any of the jobs. What jobs were gained were very menial jobs, cleaner's jobs and stuff like that. So there was really no strategy whatsoever to ensure that the people who are most in need were able to benefit from it. We want to learn from those types of experiences, and we don't want them repeated in Girdwood. We would like to see Girdwood developed in the best possible way, in a holistic way, so that local people who are most in need can benefit from it in real terms and that it isn't something that just sits there

and people look at it and say that has nothing to do with us, which has happened in many of these regeneration sites.

Belfast city center has been massively, radically transformed since the peace process. Everyone welcomes that; it's turning into what is potentially going to be a really great city. Again, all along the outskirts in the edge of the periphery of Belfast city center are areas of huge deprivation and poverty. And that's bad for people's psychology and it's bad for future development of Belfast because the problems that are here within these communities will spill over and affect everybody's quality of life. So to me with new this opportunity, why not take it and do the best job that you possibly can rather than just going for what's the most convenient? And what's been most convenient up till now has been the trickle down economic approach- 'Let's get economic growth that's the main thing, get economic growth and the economic growth *will raise all boats*, there will be a trickle down affect everyone will benefit from it.' Well it hasn't trickled down into places like the new lodge or the Shankill or the Lower Oldpark or Tigers Bay or Ardoyne or the Markets and Strand and places like that. The same persistent levels of deprivation are in place. So something more radical needs to be done. Something more focused and something more strategic needs to be done. And places like Girdwood actually provide an opportunity, in my view, for planners, government, and communities to come together and actually create something which could act as a model of best practice in this regard. The opportunity is there. It's going to be very very difficult, but it's ok to say these things. To make it work, it's far more difficult... but I mean that should be the fundamental principles that underpin all of that. And if people adopt that approach I think anything can be achieved. Is that ok, do you understand?

I know you're sort of coming into this, and sometimes maybe I can talk about it as if it's an esoteric thing, people from outside maybe don't fully understand what's been happening, what's been on. But hopefully I've been able to contextualize everything.

*Oh yeah, I'm just trying to grab all these thoughts... you said this needs to be really radical, it sounds like there's a lot of stake. Is that fair to say?*

Again, you have to sort of understand the psychology here. And this isn't about people just complaining and whinging because they don't like the nature of society or how the economy's working. When the conflict was on here, we were persistently bombarded with this idea that if you could get rid of the violence, the money that was being poured into security operations, the money that would be attracted in by outside investment - that all of these wonderful things would happen if only we could get rid of the violence. Now the violence has been stopped a long time now, or else it has almost totally gone away, but there hasn't been any kind of commensurate economic development. That's the simple fact of life. And there's a tendency to blame people, blame the poor for their own problem and tell them that they should pull themselves up by their own bootstraps and stop complaining. The reality is that people within these communities, if you look at educational attainment, skills, the lack of



investment, housing conditions and all the associated facts that go with that, ill health, drugs, anti social behavior, it's almost like a big circle with people finding it difficult to break out of.

There's a certain social fatalism which takes hold amongst many people who say that 'this is it, this is the way it's always been this is that way it's going to be.' So how can you actually motivate people within that context? And so it's radical only in the sense that it hasn't been properly done before. This isn't – you're not talking about anything massively revolutionary here. In actual fact if you look at all the government policies and statements and all the rest of it down through the years, it's all supposed to be geared towards this type of outcome. They have spent huge amounts of money, wasted huge amounts of money, on policy initiatives which have delivered little or nothing. And really where people, and I think I, I know I'm not a lone voice here, if you speak to most people who are on the ground who have thought about this, they know that fundamental trigger here to bring about the desired change is jobs. And in order to do that people need to think outside the box. They need to stretch themselves further, and stop using the tried and tested methods. Because we heard much about the economic growth and how wonderful it all was and yes, it was wonderful for some people, but for a hell of a lot of other people it wasn't wonderful at all. And what you've saw is communities that once were very very coherent, very very together, very very resilient, being unraveled. Because when the conflict was on people knew what they were up against. They knew basically, they had an idea of who the enemy was. When the conflict stopped, things became much more complicated, much more complex. A lot of people feel, 'how did this happen? How did we move from conflict to peace and end up basically in the same situation in social and economic terms?' And then in many people's minds it's worse because you have in areas like this you have levels of drug dealing that you didn't have. Drug taking, drug dealing... within the past three weeks in this community two young people, two young men, one of them 16 years of age the other one 22 years of age, lost their lives as a result of drugs. One of them took an accidental overdose; another one lost his life to suicide, directly related to drugs. That's a common feature now. You have high level of alcoholism.

So, you've got all of these things, as I said, the term that I use is fatalism and I think that's true amongst a lot of people. We're working within that context, in the community sector, to try and ensure that the community doesn't unravel completely and that we can get this right and we can get back on track. We're offering people hope and we're offering people whatever opportunities we can. But we need help to do that, and the way the economy and the economic policy have been driven hasn't catered for that at all. It hasn't taken that into consideration. To go back to the point that I made, part of the sort of general thing which was happening across the world this neo liberal drive to privatize everything, get economic growth, and 'everything will be great.' It hasn't worked. And what's happening, the frightening thing now is that in addition, now that the economy has went down the tubes, the social services and the public services that help sustain these communities are now under threat as well. And there's a fear that the community sector will be asked to shoulder more of the burden and maybe doing it with less resources. So that's crazy. So really sometimes you feel as if you're a bit like King Lear, and the tides coming in and try as you will to stop it, it's very difficult. So I don't want to be too pessimistic about things, I mean, these communities have gone through the worst of times when the conflict was on; you had absolutely nothing. What held them

together was their own sense of themselves, their own pride in themselves. So I think that's still there. But it's been damaged and I think it's psychological in many ways because of the context. Peace comes, expectations are high, and these expectations are dived.

Are you depressed? (Laughter)

Everything's relative, you know, people come here from different parts of the world, from Eastern Europe and Africa and they think, 'this is ok here...' for them it is, you know? Poverty is relative. And once you start saying 'we could be living in a mud hut,' next thing you may end up living in one. So it's not acceptable that some people live in luxury and other people live in comfort, and others can't. And we accept as well, our attitude in community development is about self help, it is about getting yourself up and doing it for yourself, but you can't do it alone. And you can't do it in the type of playing field that we have which is totally unlevel. There's a lot of talk about equal opportunities for people but there aren't equal opportunities. You don't have the same opportunities if you come from the New Lodge or the Shankill. You're born into a sort of poverty situation, there's no culture of education, work, all of these things. So how do you expect young people... you're born into something, some very talented people do move on out but the bulk of people stay. And they live that life. Each in these areas our life expectancy is low, check the statistic. Life expectancy is a hell of a lot lower. All of these things are interwoven. And although government, particularly the new Labour government, talked about this sort of holistic approach to development and active citizenry which would be linked into government public, private, community all working together. And they tried some initiatives; none of it's actually worked because the fundamental dynamic behind it again as that whole idea of neo liberal idea of economic growth at all costs. And taking as many restraints off the market as you can, deregulate, and even under Labour I know they didn't deliberately go to cut back public services but the outcomes, you can see the outcomes, they toadied to the banks and the banks have destroyed the economy and now we're all going to have to pay for it. When you look at our communities, they didn't benefit from all this anyway, not really.

*How does the history of the Girdwood site affect the way it is viewed now?*

Well you've also got the gaol there. Many people from these areas were in that gaol. Going back a long time, to 1971, people were actually taken into Girdwood and tortured by the British army during internment. They were severely beaten and tortured there. So those memories, the younger population wouldn't have the same memories, the same sense of it. The problem is, as I said, you have a Protestant community which is in decline. You have areas there which are basically under populated compared to Nationalist communities. They see Girdwood as a potential for further encroachment on their territory. There is a genuine fear that this will become a Nationalist housing estate. The DUP have always feared losing seats in North Belfast; they will try anything and everything, and have done, I think, to stop the progress of Nationalist growth in North Belfast. And that means stopping housing. And they were supported up until

recently by loyalist paramilitaries, particularly the UDA. They were saying 'we don't care; we will stop Catholics getting houses in other parts of North Belfast.' The DUP wouldn't have said it as blatantly but for all intents and purposes that's what they were at. So it was a war of attrition. Most things that have to be done in North Belfast have to be done, because of the nature of it, on a partnership basis. And these partnerships in the past have been very difficult because if one side sees the other as the enemy rather than people that you need to work with to come up with joint ideas and strategies and all the rest to resolve common problems, then you're always going to be in that sort of situation where the conflict is perpetuated in different ways. The difference I see now is that the politics have changed, the DUP have changed. I don't know if they've changed to the degree that's necessary but I also see a big change within people working within Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities. Whether or not we have arrived at the point where Girdwood can be developed in a way that suits everybody, I don't know. The other problem obviously now is that the money isn't there that was going to be there. It was private money that was going to develop it. And we weren't particularly opposed to private developers being a part of the process; we just didn't want it to be swallowed up by them and the community left as usual.

So I don't know if that helps you, that's where we're at. The most recent initiative is the one Belfast City Council has actually applied to the European Union for the potential to develop a leisure hub as they call it. That will be subject, even if it's a successful application, subject to discussions and negotiations across communities. There will have to be consultation in it. All of these things. The application may succeed and we may be back to where we are. The fear that I have is that you have a prime site there - we don't have very many prime sites, we don't have that many developmental opportunities - which could go to the wall, which could just stagnate and then everybody loses. I don't know, it may be a wee bit harsh to say, but some people may think that's ok as long as there are no catholic housing there. I hope that's not the case, but I feel that some people, on the extremes, really would think that would be an ok outcome. That's an attitude, 'we don't care, and we'll eat grass as long as you don't get anything out of it.'

And then again, you never know this opportunity that the council's presenting may turn into something real. I think that's what we need. We need something to kick start it, we need a platform to build on. We need something that we can say to people, 'this actually works, look how it's working, and it's not detrimental to your interests.' Once you build that confidence, then the more negative influences begin to lose their influence. So that's sort of the thing we need. But we're not there even with that yet. And Girdwood is now- how many years I can't even remember- it's a long, long time lying there vacant, as is the gaol, with little to nothing going on.

*Would you say there's potential, it just needs...*

There's definitely potential, there's lots of potential, but it needs resources to do it. It needs community agreement. It needs political will as well. Even if the community groups get together and agree, there are politicians torpedoing everything. And I honestly know that the Protestant/Unionist community has concerns, genuine concerns, about territory and housing

and that other stuff. I understand that I'm not trying to dismiss that. But, in my experience of this is that the Nationalist community and its political leadership have been far more open to compromise and discussion and negotiation in relation to this. In the past. So if we can get over this hurdle of housing, because what people on the u side need to realize is that community workers and political rep are answerable to their people. And the people are saying, 'why can't we have some housing there as long as it's located in a sensitive way, in a way which is not threatening anyone?' Why would you not have housing there? There is definitely parts of the site where housing could put which wouldn't be threatening which wouldn't be encroaching on other peoples territory and to be honest with you I don't know of anybody who would want to live in a situation like that anyway where there's a potential for their house to be attacked, constantly living in fear. People don't want to live like that.

But again it's down to the political will. I think there's more community will than there ever was before. It needs to be backed by political will. There are other sites as well which are bigger than Girdwood which no one even talks about, north foreshore? which is near Belfast \_\_ there is a huge, huge area far dwarfs Girdwood. Its not contentious there's things that can happen there are well. So we also have the University of Ulster campus which is going to be brought down over the next few years, 1000s of students coming in. that can bring with it its own problems but it also brings opportunities for the community. We have a commitment there from the vice chancellor a verbal commitment at least that there will be community benefits and he's open to engaging it in discussion. He has actually spoke and at conference which we organized recently. Si there s a lot of other things happening there's potential there's really good potential and that's why I'm sort of hopeful about things. I hope I didn't paint to bleak a landscape, but that's the realities as well. You just can't dismiss all of these things, the big problems. But there are also big opportunities.

*I've heard a lot of political talk about "shared space-" what does that actually look like?*

There are a lot of shared spaces at the moment. People are shopping together, people are now... as I said to you the growing improving relations between the community groups mean that people are now coming and going to each others centers, they are projects are being jointly organized, I can think of lots of things that have happened recently. Like senior citizens trips together, last year we had a Halloween lantern parade which was cross community, first time ever in n Belfast, 2000 people. All of theses things are happening. I think what the policy makers mean when they say shared space is people living and working together. I think we're nudging towards situations gradually bit by bit, everything is interlinked. The politics of the situation as well always impact. One of the big issues here for example is commemoration and marching... we work year round with people from tiger's bay. We have good working relationships with them. We trust each other, I think, reasonably well. We know that we both want what's best for all of our communities, we have a vision that ultimately we can actually get to the stage where segregated living will be a thing of the past. But then every year you have the orange parades. Now, I know rep have parades as well I'm not trying to point score

here, but the thing is with the spaces like Duncairn Gardens, where we have a thing called \*\*\* which comes every two years and you have everything to do with that, where people are boxed into their areas while these people march through basically or past their houses. That creates big problems if people object to it it creates problems in the Protestant/Unionist community because they say they don't respect our culture they don't want us here and if there is trouble or conflict at those things then that can set everything back for a long time. In recent times it's the same progress our partners in the unionist community have moved bonfires which they used to burn on the interface which created a great tension, potential for cross community rioting... stuff like that. Those bonfires have been moved back, again a sign of the times. They're trying to move away at least a degree, from bonfires to beacons and stuff like that. So there's a lot of small things, there's been a reimagining, a lot of the Loyalist paramilitary murals have been removed, as well as around here. There are still some rep murals that have been taken away...without any it's just something that people did themselves. But you can see signs of progress all of it geared towards getting people to feel less threatened and then eventually feel that they are not threatened at all then feel comfortable moving around. I think we're actually getting to that, but not there yet. And then ultimately I supposed a most symbolic sign would be bringing down the so called peace walls, but again that can only be really achieved when people feel that it's ok, that it's not an issue. There's a psychological sort of comfort as well knowing that the walls there and if anything does, anything might happen... it's the fear of something rather than the actuality of it a lot of times, and where if we can get it to the point where people stop even thinking about that because of its past history, then other things will flow from that remember prior to the outbreak of the conflict here in 68 69 many people were living in sort of shared space. There was still segregation they were still ghettoized but there was a lot of integrated living. My uncle and his wife and children lived in Rathcoole, which would have been in N Belfast, and they were put out they were intimidated out when the conflict. Bobby Sands, who you know, he was from Rathcoole as well. I had areas like this where people were living, perhaps people were... I was speaking to a guy the other day... people would say he left, and even that in itself can cause tension. If there shooting and rioting I suppose you can say you were intimidated out. I wouldn't even get into all of that its history. But even that can cause, even talking about that is difficult. Who did what, blame games start. All of that's always there and if something happens to inflame that then it can set back all the progress that had been made. Having said that, again I am very confident that we are moving incrementally towards a situation where peace is becoming more and more embedded despite the fact that you had a policeman killed the other week. In many ways you can see it in the reaction in the news. In many ways that has, it's a terrible thing, in many ways it has actually solidified the peace and has helped built confidence across communities because people in the Unionist community would traditionally see Nationalist community as enemies of the police they've seen the reaction. And I think it's a really genuine reaction because people want to move forward. So all of that stuff's going on there and I really I am confident I feel optimistic about where we're moving to. Girdwood would be a huge symbolic significance if we were to get something there and it went well and was developed. We have a view that anything that's there should be community management, cross community management develop a trust or something along those lines. Again communities working together. We are currently here in the

Ashton center in partnership with community organization in tigers bay and we're looking at a joint site on Duncairn gardens which is an interface which would develop some sort of community building. Hasn't been worked out, we haven't had the money yet but we've an application in. if it's successful then we have to work out exactly what we want there but that would be huge symbolic significance in an area that was once totally polarized and segregated, people actually working and sharing a project together and building something together. And from that other things could flow. You know so this is really difficult a lot of people outside looking in and even people sometimes within our own communities don't see all this stuff and they wonder what they hell we're doing half the time. And really what you're involved in is these sort of processes which are really time consuming difficult, complicated, but you now that the prize at the end of it is that you're actually helping to create and transform society and create a new society which hopefully will have learned everything from the past and we can not repeat those mistakes. That sounds a little clichéd but it's true. We hear people saying that but that's what we bring on the ground because people within the community sector people from these areas who went through it, a lot of people involved are former prisoners, and they understand what the price of conflict and the cost of conflict as much as anybody I suppose. And using their experience and their credibility to influence change in a very positive way. Influence people in a very positive way. So that's what we're bringing to Girdwood. Difficult as it is. So maybe next time I see you there will be something actually going on in Girdwood, and we can have a talk about how its going rather than I wonder will there ever be anything there. Hopefully something will happen in the next year or two here, something has to happen. Or else we're going to lose the opportunity or the potential.

Interview with Stephen Reid,  
Wednesday 13 April 2010  
2:00 PM  
The Vine Centre, Crumlin Road, Belfast  
Transcribed

Where do you want to start?

*I guess first – when was the vine centre started?*

The Vine centre has been going since 1970. I suppose it's - I don't know how much of the history of this area you know

A little bit

Ok. Basically, the reason this organization came into being was that sort of 1969-70 this was an area where there was a lot of trouble and where people were being forced to leave their homes and the two Presbyterian churches who served the Crumlin road area basically people were confronted with all the kind of practical problems of having to move home with short notice and the vine centre began in part as a response to that. So the two churches wanted to do something practical to help those people and that's how this organization began.

In terms of where we are now, well you've probably seen there's nothing on the site [Girdwood]. And probably, certainly, in the short term highly unlikely that there's going to be a great deal going on to it. Whether there's a master plan or not. As I understand everything is dependent on a private developer being willing to take on the site. It's not going to be done by government. So basically, there's a bit of a hole I suppose. Between the gaol and sort of the other end, the Cliftonpark Avenue. Which I suspect is not going to be filled in a hurry. Your particular interest is housing?

Well that came up as one of the concerns with the area as well as what the use of the site would be and how it would best serve the community

Well, I suppose – my original understanding was that it was all meant to be a site of regional significance. But at the minute I'm not really very clear about how it's going to become that. I don't know if you've seen the latest version of the Masterplan

The one I've seen was 2007.

Right. I think there was a revised version last year which – I don't know, I think it's just not very impressive, to be honest with you. The issue of housing has always been a bit of a concern in the unionist areas which adjoin the site because Cliftonpark Avenue still is an interface. So, I suppose people get a little bit concerned about the idea of that interface being moved in any way. My sense is that not a lot is happening at the moment. Not a lot is going to happen. I think the issue of housing has been raised again in the last few weeks for electoral reason and

probably hasn't done anything -certainly on this side of the site to reassure people about the future of the Girdwood site. I'm sorry I'm not really sure

*It's fine. I just had basic things that I wanted to talk about but I didn't write down questions because I'm coming in from the outside so I don't have ideas about what is most important and I didn't want to make assumptions. I guess – is there a sense here that something should be done on the site?*

Yes. I think it's very – yes. I think people would like to see something on the site. In this area there is a- I don't know how far up the Crumlin road you've been but in this area you have probably the largest sort of collection of vacant property and derelict sites in the whole of Belfast. It wouldn't surprise me if that was the case. So you just don't have the Girdwood site, you have all that land around Cliftonpark avenue you have the land at the junction here, you have then a lot of vacant property as you go up the Crumlin road and you have the Hillview site, which was going to be a supermarket and that has now had the plug pulled on it so I'm not sure what the future of that site is going to be. In theory, what happens in Girdwood and the regeneration of this area could be a driver for positive change that goes further up the Crumlin road so people would like to see something. But I think the issue of housing has kind of been a distraction from that idea. It's also been, I think, not poisonous, but it certainly has a tendency to polarize people rather than unite them. And it becomes a very politicized issue as well.

*Just having the interface there – would bringing the interface further in....*

Well if you look at the history of north Belfast, you have a very high degree of residential segregation. So, the default thinking that most people have is that if you build houses there, they will be lived in by one community or the other. That's what experience tells people. And in these circumstances people presume that that's going to be housing for people from the Nationalist community. And instead of having that space, you're going to bring a residential area in. You're going to have two residential areas which are potentially going to be much closer than they are the minutes, and I suppose – are you going to speak to Janice at Lower Oldpark?

*I haven't made any contact...*

You probably should because she could give you a better insight into this than I would, but certainly people over there would be – that's a community where a lot of people have moved out, where it's had its problems, and probably what the people who are living and working there want to do is to try and stabilize the area. And they see the sort of issue of housing on the Girdwood site as being potentially destabilizing. But I suppose it's also, it sounds then very



negative because there is an assumption then that if you're saying you don't want housing on the site that you are against meeting – there's clear evidence of housing need and the vast majority of that come from people in the Nationalist community. As I say I wouldn't dispute that. The question is whether or not the Girdwood site is the best vehicle for partly meeting that need. Given the wider remit that they talked about about having a site which was going to be accessible to both communities, was going to be, the word they used was porous. That's not people experience of what happens when you put houses somewhere. Thought that's not to say, personally I think somewhere along the line there is – it's a political deal I suspect to be done which uses part of the site for housing and then develops the rest as a separate development. Which then remains try to that goal of being something that can benefit both communities. And for me that would be something that creates employment. Things have varied; initially when they did the consultation people came up with grandiose ideas about museums and all sorts of things. I've heard people recently say stick a shopping center on it. I suppose the current climate we're being a wee bit more realistic and perhaps not as ambitious but I suppose that in an area where *there is* where employment is a major issue, unemployment. It seems to me that one of the things the site could generate is jobs for people in both communities.

*So is*

Well it's nothing. So essentially it's, I don't know if you mean in the sense of it being a buffer. I suppose yes and no. but essentially it's just a derelict site with – I suppose the worrying thing is maybe there was a window of opportunity in the last decade to develop it but that window now is probably gone. For the time being if the government doesn't have any money the private sector, particularly property developers have very little money. So the question is what is going to happen on the site? Despite it being contentious I'm not even sure how realistic the prospect of housing is.

With the economy/

Yeah. But also because housing would have to be – there would have to be some degree of political agreement before that went ahead.

I was looking at the Masterplan from 2007 – and in it, it used a lot of lofty terms, and was really optimistic. They suggested having mixed housing on one part of the site. I'm trying to get a sense of if that would appeal to people now.

It would appeal to, well; it has been done elsewhere in Northern Ireland- in Enniskillen? Somewhere in Fermanagh I think. It has been done. But this is N Belfast. It's a slightly different context. It's a more heavily built up, urban area. So I'm not really sure –put it this way, I'm kind

of making a sweeping generalization here, but I guess that people who might be interested in that would be people who would be sort of economically better off, middle class professionals. And I'm not quite sure if your average middle class professional is ready to come and relocate to Cliftonpark Avenue given what might be available elsewhere in the city. Even in a good cause. So no, the talk is always... the issue to people here is that it's social housing. And that's where the perceived need is. Social housing. And that's a different proposition altogether. I do think it's- the plans look great on paper, but the reality is that nothing ever turns out quite as well, very little turns out quite as it's planned. I mean, I think- would it be nice if there was a mixed housing development on the site? Yes. Is it realistic? Currently, no. They also talked about perhaps developing housing for the use of the staff in the hospital. I could see where that might work. But again, that's not – if there's a need for housing, that perhaps isn't a vehicle for meeting it either. So I don't know. I think in some sense Janice could probably maybe arrange for you to speak to some people who live here – I don't actually live here. But if you get a sense of how they feel about it, it's very easy to think it sound very negative. But those are people who live there. They have a different experience to you or I so their perspective on it is very different, you know? And they're more inclined to be perhaps a wee bit suspicious of plans for housing and stuff because at the end of the day any impact is going to be directly on them not you or me or other people who are talking about it.

*You mentioned creating jobs- what other benefits are important for the community for this plan?*

Well I kind of think what you want to do is you want to create jobs, you want to provide amenities for local people, you also want to connect this part of the city into the city centre and into the wider city. So something which is going to bring people from elsewhere in Belfast would perhaps be good. But it's also I think going to, make that connection between the kind of city centre and this area in a way that it isn't there presently. I suppose also on another level somewhere that people from regardless from which area in this part of the city they live in, that they can go and work in, and use, and basically get the benefit of, I suppose. What that is, I mean people did have quite fancy ideas given the gaol and the courthouse that there should be some sort of historical theme about museums and stuff like that or something like a standard shopping center, still it's something that would open up this part of the city cause I think you have people here tend to be I think sometimes excluded is the wrong word, but they're horizons because of their economic circumstances and various other things perhaps are a little bit narrower than other people's. so something that'll broaden those horizons. That's a little clichéd, sorry, if you think about it... It's very difficult because it's not- I don't get a real sense that there have been consultations and plans done, but I don't get a real sense that as of today we are any closer to getting something happening on the site than we were when they cleared it. Which probably makes all of that very difficult. Do you know what I mean? Because in a sense - government has produced these plans but the government in and of itself isn't going to make that happen. So what is the value of something, what is the value of producing something like that when you don't have the levers or the mechanisms to actually guarantee that these

drawings you are producing will actually come to fruition and turn into buildings? They now have a thing for an underground car park and stuff... all sorts of things. I did get a copy of the – they gave out a map. I didn't keep it unfortunately, which is the revised Masterplan. But I just wonder how closer are we a lot of the time has elapsed since some of these ideas were first given. How much closer are we to seeing anything happen? At the minute you have a proposal from the council to build a community hub. If you've heard of this?

Just yesterday

Some people are – I think people are being supportive of it because it is somebody who is actually willing to do something on the site. But again, it's a far cry from – you're talking about one small part of the site. Not these grandiose visions of the whole site being developed. So it's, I think it's very difficult if – I also think there's part of it, I think people the consultation stuff that was done on the outset, didn't work very well I think. People were unhappy with it, they thought that it wasn't very – their experience of it was very negative. In part probably because well, in part probably because their attitudes towards some of the ideas was very negative, but also I think that some of the people who were doing the consultation didn't want to hear some of the things local people had to say. Which were negative, but until you say them an address them then how can you translate that into something positive? So, I don't know part of me thinks that at the outset – I'm not really sure what more I can tell you than that because it is kind of, to me it's just the whole thing is in limbo at the minute.

That's the sense that I get, that everything is just kind of sitting – but I noticed that they are working on the gaol at the moment.

Yeah, they're going ahead to develop at least part of the gaol as a visitor attraction. So, there is a program of work, I think it's due to complete this year so that it can reopen again in 2012. And that's a good thing, I mean the fact that it's that thing about maybe the economic impact for people living here will be relatively limited in that it's not going to create 100s of jobs, but it is going to start bringing people back into this area. Perhaps that will be a good sign, you know, I mean we used to have we have a volunteer here, each year from the Presbyterian Church in the US and generally they spend [art of their time here and part of the time with the church. We had a girl here 3 years ago who was from Texas and she was here part of the week and in the church called Cook Presbyterian the rest of the week. When she got a lift back over from the church, they wouldn't come any further they dropped her at Carlisle circus even though she lived farther up the road. They weren't willing to come any further because they have a very negative perspective of this place. In that sense, something that brought people here from elsewhere in Belfast and elsewhere in Northern Ireland into this area and started taking away some of those negative perceptions that people have of this area will be a good thing. The fact that people will come up onto the Crumlin Road, in a way that they probably wouldn't have 5 or 10 years ago, will be a good thing I think. And the work they're doing is quite impressive it's about restoring the fabric of the building and making it accessible. So I mean that's it looks

good. I've been down in to see the work and it looks quite impressive. The courthouse unfortunately is collapsing but that's another story altogether...

I mean, those are the – I don't know talking about this to someone else last week – Belfast doesn't have a lot of historic landmark buildings. If you think about the city, coming from city hall, for instance in this direction, there aren't that many, there are a handful, and this would be, the gaol and courthouse, are sort of significant historical buildings. And while some thing's happening with the gaol the courthouse is basically sitting. What some of the wee lads locally haven't been able to set fire to, that's what's still standing. And something should be done with that. It's going to be left, o don't know, its close to the point of collapse. I can't imagine it's in much of a state. It seems quite sad that that's happened.

*I get the sense that this is a lot more complicated than it might seem from the outside, even from someone who is from Belfast but not from this area?*

I would agree. I think it's that thing about my experience of living here has been very different from the experiences of the people living around this site. If you live in Lower Oldpark, your experience –and this is an educated guess because it's not my experience, it's theirs- but my guess is what you've seen is that the area you live in has contracted. The number of people living there has gone down over the years. They've had other problems in terms of – they had a period during which the area was under the control of a well known loyalist paramilitary, which probably didn't make it the nicest place to live. So I mean, their experience, their perspective is governed by that experience. And it's a very sort of negative experience, I suppose. So it breeds a kind of, I wouldn't say an entirely negative perspective, but it probably makes people a little bit more reticent when they are asked to contemplate change because change they've experienced hasn't been particularly good.

How – this might be hard to answer – but how does the population decline affect the community identity?

In this area it's been – people tend to, you've quite strong localized identities. So people will say they come from lower Oldpark or Lower Shankill or Tudor. But then that sort of broader sense of identity then is not so prominent. People tend to be, not sure is parochial is the word, but people tend to have a very localized thing. So, you've people who live in this area and you've people who live in that area and they see themselves as two separate groups. And then you've also people who live on the other end of Cliftonpark Avenue and they're seen as being an entirely separate group altogether. But it is, I think it's made people kind of, not sure if the word's introspective, but it kind of – people's horizons have kind of narrowed, I think, as a result. I mean, I don't know how much you know about N Belfast but N Belfast is very , the idea that people sometimes have this idea that N Ireland is divided, or was divided, into these big blocks and some were orange and some were green, but that's not the case here. It's more

intimate geography. So if you walk up this road you move from one area, you can move from one area into another local people, somebody that lives here will know that much better than you or I do in that sense. So I think it's made people kind of, I think introspective is probably the wrong word, but it has kind of narrowed people's horizons. And there is that sense that people talk about N Belfast, but there isn't the, it's, that's not a cohesive identity for people either. Which I suppose is a bit strange because you have people who are living a matter of yards apart who in most other parts of the world would be considered to live in the same area but who perceive it very differently; they don't perceive it that way.

That makes sense...

If you were to come, an outsider, and you could drive around here and in some areas you will see flags and stuff which are indicators of what allegiance or another but in a lot of areas now you won't see that but you can – where I live you can turn a corner and drive along one street and you're in a unionist area at the bottom of the street, there's no sign or anything up that says you're leaving – you know what I mean/ it's not as if you've checkpoint Charlie, but when you get to the end of the street you're in a Nationalist area. And it's that kind of, I think it's that kind of - it's a very kind of, I think the word intimate is a better than introspective. It's an intimate geography. And it's tied up in where they feel safe going, and where they would consider or not consider going. And I suppose that =, the thing about the regeneration of that site for instance is that if people here became more economically active, more socially mobile, those are the sort of things which will break down those barriers. Not – it's that kind of byproduct of it I think would be the positive thing. Rather than sort of- well I don't now. I've been told that sounds very negative. The housing thing doesn't address that problem, it simply perpetuates it. Whereas if you had even something as mundane as a shopping center, then it is an agent for breaking down some of those barriers. If people can shop together, work together, then maybe in the longer term they can, in a broader sense, live together. That all sounds very trite, doesn't it? I suppose it is true.

I just think that it's very easy to sound cynical, but it's just essentially, as far as I can see, for the next few years the site isn't going to be much of anything, it's just going to be vacant space. Which is unfortunate, I think a wee bit of nibbling around the edges, but it's not going to make a huge difference. And that's quite sad, I think. Because one of the things I suppose people will tell you is that, I mean, you had a prolonged kind of economic boom in N Ireland during the late 1990s for about a decade I suppose. And people around here didn't benefit a great deal from that. And now we are on the downturn and people who haven't benefitted a great deal and for the time being aren't going to get the opportunity to benefit, there's a site which could have been something positive in the area. And nothing's happened, which is partly money, partly politics, but for all intents and purposes what we're left with is just another vacant site.

What do you think it would take to kick start it – obviously money, but what else?

I don't know, I kind of think there has to be, at some point, an honest conversation about the housing issue. And some sort of agreement needs to be reached as to, first of all, is housing going to be part of the regeneration of the site, and secondly in what way? People in, I suppose one of the things is that people in what are seen as unionist areas have quite a negative view their position has been they don't want housing. That's the kind of impression. And it's that thing about, it seems really negative because not only is it, saying no is not a very positive thing I suppose, but it's also that idea that in saying no you are also denying or thwarting someone else's need. I don't think you can dispute that there is a need for housing, the real question is do you need it on that site? And if you say yes, then how do you make it in a way that is consistent with having a broader development which is something else which is about people from regardless of their background or where they live, that they can access it and benefit from it. And that is ultimately that's the political issue. And probably around the time we're having an election is not the best time to be trying to do that. But I think there probably is a deal which says that you put housing on part of the site and the rest of the site then is developed separately. I kind of think the opportunity that was there has, for the time being, been lost. And it is very hard to see where the next window of opportunity is going to come from in the current climate when you have; we've just had the collapse of the housing bubble and property developers going bankrupt and things like that. Where are the people who are going to be interested in this site? The court house is a very good illustration. The guy who acquired the courthouse was going to turn it into a luxury hotel. And times have changed, he wants rid of it now. It's not going to happen. So it's that kind of- I think that's why people now are talking about much more mundane things like a shopping center or something. Ten years ago we were coming up with great ideas for museums and all sorts of things but people's expectations have changed. And I think there are probably people out there who don't want to get involved in a discussion about that site and don't want to be involved because their experience of it has been so negative.

Manus Maguire Interview

Friday, April 15, 2011

9:30 AM

Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum, Cliftonpark Avenue, Belfast

Transcribed

*The first thing I just wanted to ask you about would be what your own involvement with the process has been.*

Well, I suppose our involvement goes back quite a few years. The first time there was talk about the relations of Girdwood and the gaol from the sense of the prison service and minister of defense would have been as far back at 1998. And there have been some discussions involving voluntary agencies and politicians but because we're what we would consider ourselves a host community because Girdwood runs along Cliftonpark Avenue, ourselves and Lower Oldpark hadn't been involved in those discussions. We thought hang on a wee minute there's something wrong here. If the communities that are actually lying close to these sites aren't being consulted then there's something wrong. So we got involved in a group called the north Belfast partnership board. And they basically sidelined it. The two communities were meeting together, trying to talk about it and we then got involved in the north Belfast partnership board who very quick decided to setup a meeting of all the taigs and all the prods separately. So they split the communities after we had brought people together.

Now we hadn't brought residents together, some residents, but not a big number. But we had just begun the process. And that fell flat on its face, nothing ever happened it was more or less, I don't think it was deliberate, but it was very ill conceived and the thing went off the bio; that the was last we heard of it. and then it 2005- before that even there was discussion about obviously the political situation after 1998, this place went nuts, I don't know whether you know the background in terms of holy cross but the front of Girdwood barracks, which is a contentious interface, you know, for it would have been battles, it wouldn't have been high profile as holy cross but it was all to do with the same events, there was people shot here, houses attacked. This area along here there would've been a huge number of pipe bombs thrown from the UDA. And along the front of Cliftonpark Avenue it was like at night like a scene out of mad max, it was just nuts. So there was high level of interface conflict.

But whenever all that died down, by 2005-006, and died down is a relative concept, you know, it wasn't at the same level. There then was discussion obviously there was the whole sort of negation, Sinn Fein had been in government and then they were out but there still have been negotiations about the gaol and the barracks. So the direct rule was still in power at the time. So they then took a decision that Girdwood barracks was going to be handed over to the Department for Social Development and gaol to the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. So they then, at that time David Hanson was the Labour minister, he was the London appointed local minister. He set up what was called the Girdwood advisory panel, in fairness to

them, in some senses there was it paid lip service to the community, because they involved 6 community organizations, and it was up to the communities to pick the people. So there were 6 areas: New Lodge, Ardoyne, Cliftonville on the nationalist side, and on the unionist side there was Lower North (areas like Tigers Bay), Shankill, and Upper North (which is like Lower Oldpark, places like that).

So each of those communities met and selected representatives. I was the rep from Cliftonville. And to be honest with you, we were then sort of bright eyed and bushy tailed and thought this is a sort of beginning of the regeneration of these communities. But it became very clear that we were only at the table to act as a rubber stamp, we weren't really there to be part of the decision making, we were there to be, I'm not sort of blaming civil servants because a lot of the civil servants certainly the officials that were more or less acting as the admin and doing there job and trying to provide as much background information and stuff, but clearly there was some people behind the scenes at the top who were more or less going, regeneration is not about addressing disadvantage. It's not about addressing poverty; it's not about addressing ill health. You sort of pay lip service to those things and without doubt there's an element of government which puts out a few pounds for that type of stuff, but regeneration, and if you look at other sites across the north, it's premised primarily on the concept of addressing market failure. Whenever I compared what community people were saying and what the statutory sector, public servants, were saying, and sort of people who were actually driving the regeneration agenda these were the main architects from the public sector. And again, some of them, they're not necessarily bad people but premised on this trickle down theory that if you created jobs in Girdwood that ultimately some of the wealth would trickle down into these communities. Well the problem is that they've tried that in different parts of Belfast like Laganside, and the Gasworks, few if any have, in fact some people would say none of the benefits have trickled down.

So that's where we came from when we went to the first meetings we were fed a bread and water diet of stator led regeneration. And at the time we didn't, we knew we were uncomfortable about it but we didn't really understand it sufficiently. But we came up with some ideas ourselves, you know, we felt that the, well we argued that there need to be an Equality Impact Assessment, where you would address the local needs. [this would make sure that different issues of inequality would be addressed with specific targets by the project] and some of the examples that we'd come up with ultimately were, for example, we went over to the Olympic site in London and you know they did some interesting background to what actually – what could have happened in the sense that they were saying that if you were, I think it was a Bangladeshi woman you were 8 times as likely to be unemployed or poor, I don't know how that has worked out in practice but the background of the stuff is interesting. So we were involved, and we used to meet on a monthly basis, the politicians were there, the civil servants were there, and most the community workers were there.

I've read through the Masterplan that was put out in 2007 – what was the process of putting that together



The process there was that you had monthly advisory panel meetings so we all were at the meetings. They were chaired by a geezer called Roy Adams who works for one of the big design companies. He's originally from here but I think he lives in England somewhere. So was probably so Roy chaired the meetings and I don't know whether you've seen the minutes but I know some of the minutes, I objected to because they just seemed to be, an number of people agreed with that, they just seemed to be taking decisions that weren't agreed on. We wanted to try and, to keep it brief, we met for a year, maybe a year and a half, some of the people who worked on the well there was the appointment of consultants partnerships, so they were brought in and what was striking about the design and I'm not critical of them as such but they seemed to be told that they weren't to go out to the community that they were more or less do their work so we were at a meeting one day and somebody said what's that building there, obviously they weren't designing buildings but concepts, and they said oh we're thinking that should be a school and there was an audible gasp from the political and the community people who were saying why would you put a school there, we're looking at building a community there so you have a community you have a school. People were saying yeah but there are schools closing down outside the area. So again, I'm not critical of them because it seemed, we sort of spoke to them, and they seemed to be told this was almost like a sanitized regeneration you don't go out beyond here. Which clearly makes need to fit in with everything else but they didn't really, they weren't encouraged or anything to actually go and talk to local people. So that created then, their experience was a one dimensional experience in the sense of their only relationship was with the people signing their check, which is the senior civil servants. So we met and we raised a whole lot of issues. Certainly about poverty about disadvantage about social enterprises and about housing, which would have been very controversial issue. One of the things we raised as well was about a development trust because we felt that the site should be that there's a government should set up a development trust and that the trust then would take responsibility for rolling out the regeneration. And in a certain sense, to be honest with you we actually, there was a project here, it actually brought over some projects from eh US which, I don't know enough about them, but from what some of the people the states we saying, it certainly seems to be pretty practice than what there is here. Here you've got a very centralized government structure and that's a byproduct of colonization, because in Ireland you never would have had a democratic structure, which I think local government would have had more power in England. Here it has little or no power. And like in parts of the states and parts of England you've got localized police forces but not here. It's very centralized. Very little bottom up stuff. Some of the examples that they gave, some of these guys came across very well. But here that seemed to be, this was the only that this could be done. And so we set up the meeting, there was some debate around them, because we were looking to ensure that there was benefit to the local community but to had to be for the wider community as well. Nobody objected to that because we were looking for things like a swimming pool in this area, but because people who live in the Nationalist community there is no particular access because the two main leisure centers are both in loyalist areas. And the reason for that is because Belfast city council was controlled by the unionists, so for 30 years they blocked the setting up of a leisure center in a Nationalist areas in N Belfast. But while, I would say most of them on the Na side would've been supportive of a leisure center, there was also some of us who said it can't

just be for Nationalist. It needs to be able to attract people from all over. It should be a 50 meter pool potentially an Olympic pool, so it sucks people in from a sort of regional area. So it actually gets people to come into N Belfast. I don't know where you're staying,

Stranmillis

Ah, so there's a bit of a difference between, even the nightlife here is totally different than what it would be in Stranmillis so people don't normally come here unless they are born here. A lot of the middle class would avoid this area like the plague. You can't really blame them.

So all those things were discussed, housing was a big issue. The issues around gentrification were discussed. People like Roy Adams refused to listen to that stuff, because it was all premised on the reality of the market. Which I don't really disagree with, but there's also the reality of poverty and disadvantage and they dismissed all that. So there was a very, and there was clearly a lot of controversy because you had the Sinn Féin and the DUP in the one room, and they weren't in government, Sinn Féin had been in government and then there was the Stormont gate thing, I don't know whether you're aware of that. Basically the RUC raided their offices in Stormont and the government collapsed for five years. So that's the background which is not unimportant. Gerry Kelly for example sat on the panel. He's one of the junior ministers sf. Nelson McCauslin is DUP minister for DCAL, he sat on it. These people aren't wallflowers. Then you had the SDLP and the UUP as well. Every so often somebody would drop a clanger and people would get all offended, I don't know whether they were or not but. It was very easy for people to say nobody can agree. People were trying to get agreement. The very last meeting took place and there was only one thing that we discussed and that was the forward to the masterplan. Everybody who was there agreed to a forward. It was quite controversial. Obviously housing, but we got a form of words which was acceptable to everybody. But the foreword never saw the light of day. So there you had some agreement, something that political would have moved N Belfast a little bit forward... I wouldn't overstate it, and whenever I asked on the civil servants why it wasn't put in, he said that it wasn't put in for; it had to be changed for grammatical reasons. So therefore as we got more and more into we become more and more wary that we were being used by the powers that be. But of course then, the draft masterplan came out with much fanfare and this had been agreed and all of these people participated. And whenever I raised questions about it, people said but you signed up to it. There isn't a thing in it that I signed up to. A lot of the things we argued for are not in it. There are things in it like the dev trust is there in an appendix. And there was one woman who worked for, there's quite a good section on how you would set up a development trust and social enterprise, and it was more grounded than what it potentially is. But apart from that, the masterplan itself – formally, that would have been the end of our formal involvement in it, it went out for consultation. Then they had to carry out an EQIA- equality impact assessment. It's legal mechanism under the Good Friday Agreement which set up the NIA, and it would have been argued for taking place, mainly I suppose the background to it would've been that historically if you would've been brought up a catholic you were more likely to be poor than if you were brought up a prod because of the way that the NI state was established and the unionism- basically the unionist employers were in alliance, so if you were a catholic looking for a job they could just tell you know, it's a bit like blacks in America, in fact the civil rights movement

took its inspiration from the blacks in the US, what they were looking for was equal rights. There's still legislation now in terms of fair employment and all of that, but there was still a necessity to address inequality and the reality is that now you've got inequality in both community my attitude is that addressing inequality is like addressing poverty and disadvantage – the EQIA is a legal tool. The difficulty is that they should've carried it out at the very beginning, before they looked at the proposals. But what they did is they did it on the draft masterplan. Which is not really what the EQIA is for. But the problem is that we live in a world where senior civil servants rule the roost and people in these communities are voiceless and powerless. I suppose it's like other societies in that sense. You've got a national issues and sectarian issues but the way poor blacks are treated in the US, or poor whites for that matter probably isn't much different than the way that poor pros or poor taigs are treated in this area.

SO what were some of the concerns that you came into the process with? What were the communities hoping to see happen?

In a way the communities didn't start out with any real concerns. What the communities were hoping to see was that there would be jobs created, that the local people could access, that there would be houses. Now obviously the concern on the protestant side was that there wouldn't be houses. There would be facilities that the local people could access, and that there would be training facilities which people could access. Essentially that Girdwood could act as an economic hub which could begin to turn North Belfast around. Different people had different views that would be sort of a broad view in this area or sort of nationalist North Belfast. But there was about housing, employment, and wealth creation. Girdwood would act as a capitalist sort of to prime the pump for the economy in North Belfast. I don't think, I think we went down a bit actually without any real major concerns our main issue was that that would be on the agenda. The other thing is that there would've been social enterprises established which could have acted as a way for training people as well as generating income for local communities.

I guess I've sort of walked this area a couple of times just to get a sense of it and – what is this interface like today?

Today – it has been fairly quiet, you know. I'm trying to think of the last upsurge. I mean there'd be sort of an odd bit of skirmishing through the year, this year, we're into April and it's been relatively quiet. But I'm talking about this side. The other side of it now, the interface, I don't know, goes right – I've got a graphic on the computer I can show you...

[gets computer, maps]

So this here's the yellow wall. The yellow wall goes from basically here (Cliftonpark Ave, front of Girdwood) and it goes along here and kinks around – goes up the back of Rosevale Street and down. So these are the main flashpoints (at intersections). They've been relatively quiet in the last years or so. We have a meeting during the week because the Orange Parades come down – there's no Orange parade in this area this year, there's one every two years and the last one was due last year. They filed to come down through this area, Cliftonville road, even though this is all nationalist. I suppose from a US perspective there's, I know like the Klan or someone, the right of expression is enshrined in the constitution, and my understanding is that, even the Klan isn't allowed to march through black areas. I know years ago there was an incident and there was, I don't know how many dozen people killed as boys opened up with weapons. The only way that they could come through here was if there was a major military operation. The whole place would have to be sealed off. Along here they would have big walls, literally a couple thousand troops to get it through.

What we're trying to argue is that the reason why you would require that is because whenever they come through they have, they dress things, they get dressed up in anti catholic regalia, there's been instances where they've been slagging off, people have been killed- that just incenses people. This area is the main flashpoint area but these areas can go off at any time. All along this interface it would've been – I started working here about 14 years ago. I used to work in a wee street off here – it doesn't exist anymore, but I couldn't even come into work sometimes because there'd be a risk of getting shot, your manager would phone you up and say listen you need to work from the house this week because somebody would've been shot somewhere else. But luckily all this stuff has gone.

If you look at it in terms of proximity, it's very close to it – Lower Oldpark, Cliftonville. So the idea that what would happen there, there would be maybe 1000 2000 jobs there, but there would be very few from these areas, doesn't bear thinking about. Some of the academics even in the states talk about the regeneration of various areas, and I'm trying to remember a guy called John McKnight who wrote a book about building better communities, but they're not community people they're academics, and they're into a sort of concept called... ABCD: asset based community development. But what they say is that it's because the fact that you've got a different type of economy today so they're saying that even where you've got the regeneration of say waterfronts in Portland or somewhere, that the jobs that would've existed there before would've been sort of dockers or carters, there would've been either unskilled or semi skilled, people from working class communities would've been working there the gasworks site in Belfast would've been semi skilled or unskilled, but the people from the surrounding areas would've been working there. Whereas all those types of jobs have gone, the new type of jobs are knowledge based jobs – one of the quotes that he wrote which was that the urban renaissance has created jobs which are all new type of jobs, they're sort of graduate entry type jobs, people in these communities cannot access them. So what's happening is that these areas are, like North Belfast, from an economic view is falling further and further behind the rest of Belfast. And if you're an American business man, you're advised not to invest in N Belfast; you're advised to go to the Titanic quarter. In fairness I do have to say, there's an issue for us as

well. To me this isn't an issue of blaming everyone else for our problems. The existence of these interfaces, in N Belfast, we've 48 about 40 interfaces, and I suppose for the want of a better term, you're not going to get a business person to invest in what's not far from a warzone. At certain times of year it can be a warzone. They will go and invest in the titanic quarter. There's an issue for us here as well. We've sort of argued that what we've got to do is get rid of these interfaces. There's an economic driver in relation to addressing the good relations issue. In 20 years time if we've got all these interfaces N Belfast will be a much worse place than what it is today because if you think that parts of NY and the whole thing around the broken window and a different type of policing, but you know that isn't sustainable unless you're actually creating some level of wealth and economy. So you've got to – the government have a responsibility in that sense, we've got to work together. I'm not blaming government, it's not the only problem, and we have a problem in our communities as well we've got to get some level of leadership coming out of our communities. We've got to say to the government, 'you need to support us.' With a power sharing exec you do have – to some degree I hope the DUP will support that type of perspective in the loyalist area and the Sinn Fein will support it in nationalist areas.

Is the empty space here [ the barracks ] important as far as the interface is concerned? People have mentioned to me fears about moving the interface, bringing it closer, or creating a new interface.

Well I suppose that's a perspective which is as valid as any. The problem is that on the nationalist side the interface is right up against the houses. So I think the protestant side is probably pushed back a wee bit more. So from basically because of housing pressure of the nationalist side, you've a growing community and it means that people are living right up to the interface wall. On the protestant side that's a bit different. They are giving a sort of \_\_\_ from ethnic cleansing by the nationalists which – I don't consider myself a nationalist, not in that sense, I'm Irish- but there's been rioting and the bulk of the attacks have come from the UDA in the last ten years. Obviously that's ended now, but twenty percent of the housing waiting lists in north Belfast are people from unionist community. Any one of them could walk in and get a new house tomorrow in lower oldpark, but they won't. Why won't they? Because they don't want to live there. They don't want to live there because it's really not a nice a place to live. I don't know whether you've been in it – it's a lot of dereliction. It's not exactly stramillis... and I'm not being derogatory when I say that because I think if people in this area had a choice they wouldn't be living here, because who wants to raise their kids in an area where there's quite a lot of crime, where there's sectarian conflict and all that type of stuff, or where paramilitaries can basically come in and tell you what to do. So I think that the problem is that the people who live there are people who basically can't get anywhere else. You've got a lot of elderly people and you've got a lot of lone parents, you've got families as well, but I mean, I think it's an indictment for anybody I mean because I think lower oldpark is actually worse than this area. It's an indictment that ordinary people have to live like that. To be honest with you at we would like to do is , if you have the regeneration at Girdwood, there's also quite a bit of land along the interface, what we would like to see is that being economic units owned by the two

communities. Which would actually create employment for local people and create training opportunities, but it'll also create a place to sustain the type of stuff that we would do. It would address the interface problems. But I don't think anybody that- that doesn't go down very well on the protestant side. I think it's unfortunate, but you've got to respect peoples' views as well.

Would you say that people from the cliftonville community are ready to work together, to – bringing jobs into Girdwood would hopefully be for both communities do you think people are ready for that?

We did a survey a couple of months ago, with about 500 houses of people living along the interface. So it's sort of, robust enough as what you're going to get. And 84 percent of people say yes, they think it's right to engage in dialogue and to work with the other community. About 8 percent said no. so that gives you an idea. You've got 80 percent of the people saying we need to move on. If Catholics and Protestants were working together would it cause problems? Probably. But that's a better problem than them not working together in the one place. And the problem for some people is- there was a case a number of years ago where a young fellow had been trained in customer care skills, interview techniques, filling in applications, all that type of stuff to get a job, he got himself a job in a shop in the town and he lasted a week because the one thing that he hadn't been prepared for, he had never met a protestant in his life. His experience of Protestants had been when they were busting through his door, they shot his father. His only experience of Protestants was people with guns and masks. But they didn't address that problem. So his world experience, which clearly was very limited, but also something that needed to be worked through, if it ever could be, wasn't addressed. So he actually worked in the town and because there were Protestants there who probably were as inoffensive as a cup, but he couldn't cope with it and left the job after a week. So there are deep problems in these areas. There are problems in this place. And the problem is that for all the talk about confidence and about communities moving on, the problem is that some of the communities haven't been able to move on. But you can't blame that guy, it's not his fault but obviously we need to, communities need to provide leadership. We were talking yesterday about stuff and you can get people who complain about... they see some work that's going on in lower oldpark and they're a wee bit blinkered about stuff that's going on here. Leadership had to say, hang on, this is what's going on here and what they're getting is, they're not getting it because they're prods, they're getting it because they're entitled to it. They should have a lot more because if you look at that place, lower oldpark requires a huge amount of investment. But it cannot be done with just investing there and not here. The problem is that is exactly what government has done. They'll put a wee bit of money here and a wee bit there...

My biggest complaint about Girdwood is that they brought a couple of community workers together to discuss it but they never brought the communities together. There were never any meetings to actually bring - maybe you needed to do this in a sensitive way, I have no problem with that- but they never actually brought like, 50 residents from each area together. In a certain sense, I don't know why they didn't. Does that suit someone's agenda? I don't know. But it doesn't suit an agenda which is supposedly creating regeneration and reconciliation in these communities.

Where do you see the site going in the future?

Well the problem is that we got to be realistic and the heady days when we say on the advisory panel and thought the regeneration was going to play a big role in terms of what was going to happen in our communities. In a certain sense it takes two to tango and the nationalist community can only do a certain amount. It people in the protestant community for whatever reason don't feel confident or don't feel secure enough o move on that we can begin to remove interfaces then they won't be removed. They need leadership as well. We'll keep doing what we're doing, trying to build better relations across the interface

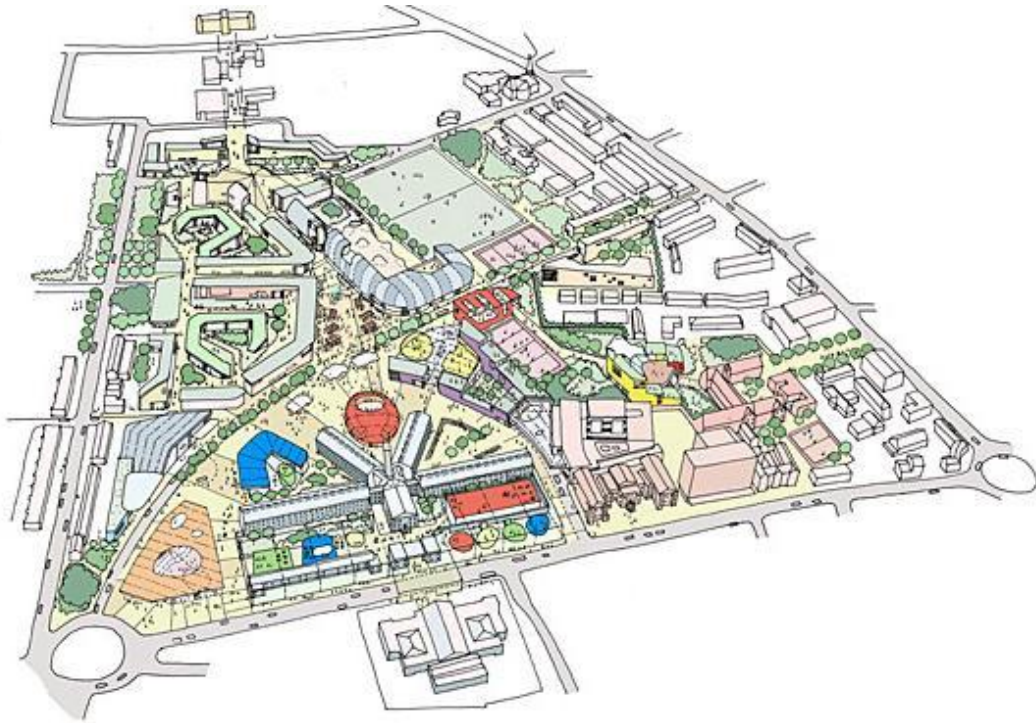
In terms of Girdwood, if you look at the masterplan, the Girdwood masterplan certainly the original draft is no base in fact anymore. It's a joke in that sense. And to be honest with you that was never discussed by the advisory panel. The idea that you would build multistory apartment buildings – that was objected to. But of course somebody somewhere had decided behind the scenes that it would do that and what they would do is, that that would pay for the infrastructure. That was never discussed in fact I don't know whether you noticed on the masterplan, there's a section on it, I don't know what page, it says that there is more – the early masterplan is sort of an outline of principles, but it still needs to have some idea of cost and there is some idea of cost, they talk about 230 million, but where do they get that figure- the detail is contained on page 93. If you look at the document it says further detail is on page 93. If you go to the masterplan there are only 92 pages. And whenever I emailed them they just say that it was an oversight. It's not an oversight because clearly there are figures there somewhere. They didn't just have that A4 sheet, they must have figures but even we were never privy to that. So to me in a way all that we can do is try and – there's a thing on at the minute where city council are talking about putting in – do you know the PEACE money, European funds from PEACE III. It's delivered through the special European programs money. City council are in for 10 million pounds to build a community hub at the flashpoint there (cliftonpark ave) if they got the money and then decided to hand over the management of it, which they have don in other places, to say ourselves and lower oldpark and lower shankill, to manage it and to provide community facilities, there would be a clear community benefit. There will be housing, from a nationalist perspective that will reduce the homelessness in the area. But in terms of it being a big economic driver I don't see that because I don't see there's been any change. What we need to look at is developing- we spent a lot of time trying to say is it Girdwood had the potential to be a big economic driver for the most disadvantaged communities. We're moving away from that because we've been banging heads against a brick wall the world we live in- people aren't interested in that. If you speak to a lot of that support agencies, in community relations council, would be supportive of that international fund for Ireland would be supportive of that, supb would be supportive. Politicians might support that. There is a small fund that's being rolled out which – it's not big enough, it's 80 million pounds spread across the North. So this area might get some money but essentially we'll be looking at what we can do, you know, with any site. We could look at it. But I would have very few illusions that it's going to create- it'll probably do what they did in the gasworks, relocate jobs

from other areas. And bring them in so people will drive in, so we need to look at where the opportunities are there. Price of land will go up ultimately, there's recession on but what's the economic opportunities within that?

We've just become wee bit more realistic. We were probably a bit – we thought this was going to be a great big hope, and every time – whenever you were raising questions people, the people who have got the power are not necessarily the politicians, sometimes I'm not sure they do have the power, they just don't, they're not from these areas they don't live in these areas, they've got a different economic model and that's the reality. Therefore we just have got to get on. We've just completed a new strategy which is a slightly different approach than what we've been adopting in the past. We're not going to abandon a lot of the stuff, but for example, if you set up a Girdwood advisory panel would we go a sit on it, I don't know. Why would we? I think that probably from an educational point of view we've learnt a bit but there's bit no benefit to the local community. Would we do it again, I'm not sure. If we did we might put, we might decide to use it purely as an educational thing and put somebody in basically to get them to understand how the system works as opposed to having a view that it will deliver anything.



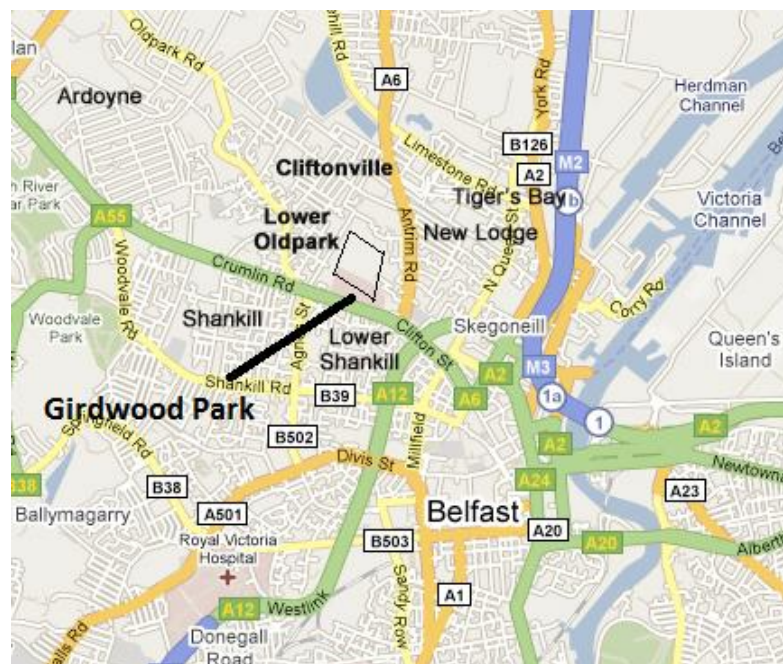
## B. Images and Maps



A sketch of the original Masterplan [2007] for the Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood Barracks site. From [www.bdp.com](http://www.bdp.com)



A map of the Girdwood site and the surrounding neighborhoods.



The Girdwood Site in relation to the City Centre.